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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY G. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 472. FOR WEEK ENDING JANUARY 15TH, 1898. [ONE PENNY.

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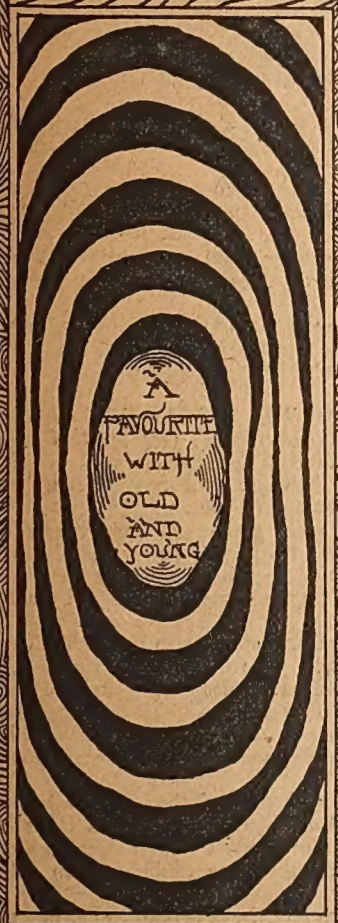
SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON



No. 472.] [One Penny.

For the Week ending January 15th, 1898.

A WAIF OF THE - - PLAINS. - -

You can't change the nature of a human being any more than the leopard can change its spots. Take a savage and make a civilised creature of him; he will probably behave well while amongst civilised people, but should he come into contact with savages again, the old man will show itself; and the reverse holds good. Take a Christian boy (or girl) and bring him up with savages, but, so soon as the strange influence is removed, you will see the old nature asserting itself.

I've seen instances of both. I've knocked about a good deal, and I know it's a fact. Why, I met with an instance of the latter kind whilst I was serving in the United States Army. Ah, yes, I ought to have remembered before I began talking that I should let myself in for an hour's yarn spinning and a dry throat. Well, I'll do you the justice of saying that I believe you when you affirm that my throat shall not be allowed to become parched.

It was the case of a child of Scandinavian descent who had fallen into the hands of the Apachés—goodness knows how—and had been "brought up" by them. Yet she quickly developed as good a specimen of the modern

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American girl as——. But there, it's a poor way to tell a story by commencing in the middle! So here goes to tell it in proper form.

For days and weeks those of us who had not flown to the safety of the town and the larger camps had watched for the coming of the Apachés, who had been raiding the outlying ranches and the smaller mining camps; and at last they came.

It seemed as though millions of howling, sharpshooting demons had surrounded the camp, and every man who could handle a rifle was needed.

Driven back from the surrounding hills to the confines of the camp proper into our very cabins, where the women and children were—bullet after bullet was sent after an unseen enemy who lay behind the rocks. Then——

There came a bugle call of which we knew not the technical meaning, but we did know that troops from Fort Bayard had come to our rescue, and that we and ours were saved.

Lieutenant Horton was in the thick of the fight, and so busy chopping at the Indians that he never knew what did happen that night, not exactly. He remembered only that when the trouble was all over in this (his first) engagement, he was the possessor of a shattered arm, a broken rib or two, a cut head, and a small, blonde prisoner, whom he had captured at the point of the sword when the troopers found the obscure canyon in which the Indians had concealed their families.

Horton's prisoner came along with surprising willingness. Her complexion was tanned by the sun and winds almost as dark as that of any Apaché, but the same influences had served only to bleach her naturally light hair to an unmistakably tow and molasses colour. She must have retained some recollection of her Scandinavian parents, else she had not come along with Mr. Horton so willingly, for she had a temper, as was presently discovered by several persons. Yet she could not, or would not, speak a word aside from the Apache dialect, and we could learn nothing through the interpreters of her origin or as to the time she had lived among the Indians.

It was embarrassing to all of us to know what we should do with this waif. Those of Apaché parentage we could, and would, return to the reservation. But this one.

The women had talked it over with doubtful shakes of the head, when John Marcus Horton strode modestly into the breach, and offered to send her to his mother in Ohio—an offer gladly accepted.

And, as it was arranged, Olga, as she was called, was sent to his mother in Ohio. A couple of months afterwards he obtained leave of absence, and was away for three weeks. During that time he had been to visit his people, to return with glowing accounts of the manner in which Olga was getting on with her studies and the ways of polite society.

He managed to get away for a day or so at fairly frequent intervals, and after each of these trips it was "Olga this" and "Olga that," until we were tired of hearing of his little "Norwegian Apaché," as one of the boys ungallantly dubbed her one time when Horton was not present. In fact we grew quite tired of it.

But when, after his third visit east, Horton returned to Silver City, bringing with him his mother and the little "Norwegian Apaché," what a change of ideas and a surrender of hearts! Instead of an angular, awkward young person, possessed of points that might make her, when developed, a beauty of the "lily" type, behold a *petite* young woman, with a wealth of pale golden hair, beautiful eyes and teeth, complexion of roses and cream, and a decidedly vigorous constitution which called for lots of horseback riding and other outdoor exercises. All of us, even the ladies, were charmed with her.

Then they began to think that it would be well if Olga captivated one of the young men and left the wealthy Horton for one of the girls, and upon this basis campaign went on, much to the evident amusement of Olga, who, with womanly intuition and a knowledge of the ways of women far beyond her years, put two and two together and told Horton it was all very funny. "Fancy those army frumps, Jack, being jealous of me—poor me! Jack" (this with mock solemnity), "are you in love with me?"

"Olga, I wish you would not talk in that frivolous manner. It isn't like you, and you should have enough consideration for me to believe those people sincere in their attentions."

And Horton turned away with a pained look; but Olga's arms were round his neck, and her face was close to his. With wet eyes she whispered:

"Jack, dear, have I hurt you?"

Never before had John Horton been so tempted. Should he now tell her what for two years had been in his heart of hearts, unknown to anyone?

It was but a momentary struggle, then Horton was himself again.

"Yes, you have, dear. Please don't speak of my friends again in that way," he said, disengaging her arms.

Olga's mouth drooped, and there was a piteous look in her eyes as she replied:

"I won't, John."

Then, with a sudden kiss, she walked away as though she intended to go to her room for a big, feminine cry.

Horton stood for some seconds, her parting kiss burning upon his cheek, her pathetic face, as he had seen it when she left him still before his mind's eye.

"I'm an old brute!" he told himself. "A man of my age" (he was twenty-eight) "talking to a buoyant, irrepressible child in that manner merely because I am supposed to be her guardian! Jack, you old scoundrel, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

If there were a male person in south-western New Mexico who did not fall down and worship that little "Norwegian Apaché," he failed, probably through fear, to disclose himself, but the case of Danby of the Ninth was the most serious.

He all but neglected his duties to be at her side when she and Mrs. Horton were stopping at the post, and, even in his infatuation, almost compromised her by falling in with one of her mad fancies one day when he had obtained leave of absence, and riding with her unchaperoned to Lordsburd and back, returning at dead of night.

For this, Horton took both of them seriously to task as soon as he learnt of the affair, as he did the evening following through his shocked and distressed mother, who rode into town in an army ambulance in order to tell him.

But a week or two later he proposed to her at a picnic given by the ladies of the garrison in honour of Olga's departure from the fort. She refused him, she was kind enough to him, and all that, but Danby took it

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rather hard, and swore he'd resign his commission, retire to the mountains, and adopt hermitage as a profession. Instead, however, he exchanged to a northern post, fell in love again and married his colonel's wife's sister, who was plain, but who had money enough to disguise the fact somewhat.

Fielding comes next. He was a leading light of the local bar at one of the larger Arizona towns, and attended to a good deal of business for Horton, who was interested in copper over there. He came to Silver City to consult with his client, met the "papoose," and a heart theretofore considered impregnable capitulated at first glance, and Fielding was lost. He neglected his other suits to attend to this one to such a degree that it hurt his practice, and in the end he met the same fate at the charmer's hands as had poor Danby—with a difference. Miss Olga told him that if he remained of the same mind until the following year he might propose again, and she "might" then consider the matter. Meanwhile if Mrs. Horton did not object he might write to her at school, but she would not answer his letters.

Poor Fielding was utterly cast down, not even the permission to write affording him any hope, and all that kept him from suicide was an earnest request from Horton neither to make an ass of himself nor to die on the premises, after which that severe guardian lectured his ward quite harshly for her flighty ways, especially when her arts were practised upon his own personal friends.

"But I don't mean to, Jack, really I don't. What makes them act so? I can't help it!" sobbed the culprit.

"Yes, you can," said her mentor severely, adding mentally, "but they can't!"

He looked out of the window a moment, then turned to her.

"Papoose," he said in a strained voice. "I think it best you and mother should curtail your visit and go back to Ohio as soon as you can pack up. I'll speak to mother about it to-night, and, well, I'll see you at Christmas, anyway."

There was a quiet sob from the sofa, which gave Horton suicidal feelings, and in another moment he would have gone to comfort the weeper, but just then he heard his mother's step on the walk, and when she entered Olga had fled to the privacy of her room.

* * * * *

It was rather more than a year later that Horton wrote his ward a letter somewhat to the following effect:

"There has been enough of this sort of thing. I suppose you do your flirting now with the hitherto sedate and dignified professors for want of better material. Now, Olga, this must stop. Here is Jim Fielding, one of the best, brightest, most intelligent fellows in the world, going to the dogs on your account. I want you to be serious and think things over, and when you come down here this time do give Jim a chance."

Olga came at the regulation time, with Mrs. Horton, and it was very shortly after her arrival—not more than two days—that Fielding again declared himself.

But it was a different Olga to whom he spoke this time. It was a girl with the same old ways, the same odd fancies, but yet a girl who could understand and appreciate his feelings and pity him with her whole heart, without making her pity obnoxious. She had known, she said, that this was coming, and had dreaded, yet hoped for this talk, but she did not tell him of her stormy interview with John Horton that afternoon when that ogre had told her she must accord Fielding a hearing, or—or—there would be indefinite trouble.

"Will you shake hands with me, Mr. Fielding?" the girl asked tremulously, when she had finished telling him how she had long thought it over, and found she could not love him. "I suppose it's useless to say I'm sorry, although I hope you know I am. So——"

"I know you are, Miss Horton. I believe in your sympathy and your kindness of heart as thoroughly as I believe in human existence. And I believe in myself enough," he went on more firmly "to think that I might be the successful one, were it not for another—some one. Good-night. God bless you both!"

They shook hands as two ordinary acquaintances might have done, and Olga disappeared through the hall and up the stairs.

That very day, Horton had made himself practically certain that the future of his giddy ward was assured; that, true to his behests and the promptings of a conscience, he had done everything to make worldly Olga engage herself to Jim Fielding. Then, after all his guests had gone to bed and he was left alone in his library, this great, big ex-soldier, thinking it was all over, and that he was forsaken, leant his head on the table and cried like a baby.

He was a baby, too, for presently someone entered the room quietly, and, kneeling beside him, said:

"Tell me, Jacky—tell your mother."

Some women are jealous of their son's loves. Jack's mother was not one of these, no matter what her other faults might be.

"You can't direct a woman's affections, darling, any more than you can direct the tides or the winds. And—it seems to me—you have done a great deal for Mr. Fielding in this case."

* * * * *

There must have been at least twenty guests at Horton's house to celebrate the home coming, and these had progressed through nearly every course, when one of the girls, who sat opposite Olga, remarked suddenly:

"Why, Olga Horton, where's your pretty solitaire? The last time I saw it——"

Olga flushed, then paled, as she rose, trembling, and showed the solitaire (a gift from Mrs. Horton from among the family heirlooms) on the third finger of her left hand.

"It's just changed hands, that's all," she said, trying to speak brightly, "because Jack and I are to be married next summer." Then she smiled on them all and was gone, and presently Jack, utterly bewildered, but entirely happy, found her in the garden crying.

"Sweetheart."

"Go away! I hate you! I——"

"Another lie," commented Jack judicially, but exultantly. "However, you're forgotten, for the sake of the cause in which it was told. But here, Sapphira, how are we to explain things?"

"Why, just go and tell them that you're an old, slow poke, and a duffer, and that I'm a silly school girl, but that what I say 'goes'—and Jack, it's just seven years ago this time that you found me, and it's leap year, too, and, Jack, you're not cross, are you?"

"Of course I am," he replied between kisses. But he did not say it with any measure of solemnity. And that proved what I said at the beginning.

RICHARD LEMON.

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The Same Old Cure.

Alida Erving sat at the window. It was a beautiful morning, and the view across the river to the towering hills beyond was an inspiring one; but Alida's eyes showed no expression of pleasure as they wandered to and fro over the lovely landscape. The girl had been ill for three weeks, and was now awaiting the doctor's visit.

Mrs. Erving was moving about the room busy with her morning's occupations. From time to time she cast a furtive, anxious look at her daughter.

"I think you are better this morning, Alida," she said for the third time. "Your colour is better, and you look more like yourself."

"Yes; I am stronger, mother. I shall soon be well," the girl replied listlessly.

"Dr. Grantley will soon be here now; he said he would come at nine o'clock this morning," continued Mrs. Erving, glancing at the clock.

Secretly, she was very much enraged at the family physician. She did not think he was doing her daughter a particle of good, and, indeed, this seemed to be the case, for Alida was certainly not improving.

There is one other person against whom Mrs. Erving cherished a feeling of strong indignation, and that was Archibald Hopkins. He was Dr. Grantley's young medical assistant, and one of Alida's most devoted friends. The young man had called twice since the singular malady which so baffled Mrs. Erving, and, she believed, the doctor also, had taken possession of Alida, and then had come no farther than the door. He had simply inquired after Alida's health and had declined Mrs. Erving's invitation to come in. She mentioned her surprise to her daughter, but only once.

"Why should Archie Hopkins come here," Alida had replied with heightened colour, "when I would most certainly decline to see him? I do not wish to see anyone until I am well."

Dr. Grantley now came in. He was a stout, florid man, with silver hair and moustache, and blue eyes which were generally very merry, but which could also look very stern.

"How is our patient this morning?" he cried cheerily. "Ah, greatly improved, I can see at a glance. There will be no more need for me to come here after this week, I fancy."

"I think you might as well have stayed away altogether," said Mrs. Erving to herself.

"Well, now that you are so much stronger, come, take a turn in the garden with me," continued the Doctor in the same cheerful voice. Alida faintly protested her lack of strength. "Nonsense," persisted the Doctor, "I am your physician, and I tell you you are quite strong enough. We shall not go far."

Slowly they walked, the fair young girl leaning on the Doctor's arm, until they reached a rustic bench under an elm tree some fifty paces distant from the verandah.

"Well," he said at length, "you are no better, are you?"

The girl looked up quickly. She thought she saw a challenge in the Doctor's eye.

"Not a bit," she answered, looking him full in the face.

"I don't know what you mean by keeping ill like this," said the Doctor, in a complaining tone. "I have visited you assiduously, have been most careful in watching the various phases of your case, and in compounding prescriptions——"

The girl's eyes were cast down, but the Doctor detected a faint smile hovering about the corners of her mouth.

"You did not take my medicine," he said.

"No—that is—yes; one powder. It was bitter, and I threw the others out of the window."

The Doctor took out his memorandum book, and, turning his back upon Alida, wrote busily for fifteen minutes.

Left to herself the girl leant her head back against the tree and closed her eyes. The Doctor did not stir. Had he brought her to this place by design? There must be memories associated with a rustic bench beneath a tree if two lovers have been in its vicinity. And, indeed, Alida was dreaming.

It was a lovely summer night. Some one was strumming a guitar and singing softly on the verandah, and Alida and Archie Hopkins sat hand in hand beneath this very tree. The music swelled louder, and Archie drew Alida gently towards him. As the song died away her head rested gently upon his shoulder and his lips touched hers. It was the night of their betrothal. Then came that wicked, senseless quarrel—Alida shivered, opened her eyes and sat upright. The Doctor had just time to turn his head away again.

"I think I will go in now," said the girl. "I am tired."

"Wait a moment, Alida," said the Doctor. "I am not angry with you for throwing my medicines away. They were only harmless tonics, but you are right, for, frankly, I did not know what ailed you. I have made an entirely different diagnosis now, and to-morrow will bring a prescription which I am confident will cure you. Promise me that you will try to get well for my sake, Alida, for if you do not get better soon your mother will shut the door upon me."

"Very well, I promise; and I will take what you

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bring to-morrow," said Alida, smiling, as she gave the Doctor her hand.

When Dr. Grantley drove home he found Archie Hopkins apparently deep in a medical volume, but he detected in Archie's eyes the same faraway look he had observed in Alida's.

The Doctor laid his medicine case on the table, sat down and said:

"Hopkins."

The Doctor evidently had something serious to say. Archie closed his book and drew his chair up to the table. He was a tall, long-limbed young fellow, with waving brown hair and a frank, handsome face.

The Doctor seemed to have forgotten that he had spoken. He had lighted a cigar and was puffing away at it, while he stared straight in front of him.

At length he said: "Hopkins, twenty years ago your father came to this town a poor young man. He needed friends, and he found one in me."

"He often spoken to me of your kindness, sir," said Archie, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"So he did to me, and he told me that if ever I wanted his aid in any matter, he would be happy at the opportunity to serve me. I never had to call upon him, but to-day I have to call upon his son."

"There is nothing I would not do for you, Doctor; but I need not tell you that, I know."

Again there was an interval of silence, while the Doctor puffed furiously at his cigar.

"It is simply this, Hopkins. I have a case which baffles me completely. It is a humiliating confession to make; but it is true. The family of the lady, old patients of mine, have found that I don't know anything about the case, and are losing confidence in me. I am greatly distressed about it," and the Doctor looked very miserable indeed.

"What is it you want me to do, Doctor?"

"Only this. You are an alert young man, and of a sympathetic nature. I only want you to look with fresher eyes at the case, which I think is one to be reached rather by intuition than by any great degree of medical skill. I want you to promise me that you will go with me to-morrow and see this patient, that is all."

"But, Doctor, you forget I have had almost no experience; and if, with all your knowledge——"

"Fiddlesticks! The longer I live, the less I find I know," said the Doctor angrily. "Sometimes I think all we old fellows ought to retire and give the younger generation a chance. It at least has confidence in its ignorance, and that is everything. Come, you promise?"

"Yes, sir; I promise."

The next morning Archie sat beside the Doctor when the latter started in his dog-cart on his daily round of visits.

It was almost noon when the Doctor turned his horse into the Egyptian Road. He had then just begun an exhaustive comparison between the old and new schools of medicine, which was not finished when he pulled up at the Erving gate.

"Tie the horse," he said to Archie, who evidently intended to remain in the dog-cart, as he did at the other places. "This is where our patient lives."

"But, Doctor," cried Archie, "why didn't you tell me it was here? I really cannot go into Mrs. Erving's house."

"Indeed, and why not?"

"Well, you see, Miss Erving and I—we are not exactly ——"

"What have I to do with such childish nonsense?" cried the Doctor, in his sternest tones. "This is a serious matter, sir."

"But, Doctor, one moment ——"

"You have promised, sir; do you want to go back on your word?" thundered the Doctor. "Come along."

Dr. Grantley strode up the walk and Archie had no resource but to follow him.

Mrs. Erving was in the porch. The Doctor gave her a look, and she expressed no surprise at seeing Archie. She said "good-morning" pleasantly, shook hands, and in reply to the Doctor's question said that Alida was in the front room.

"Is she alone?" asked the Doctor, in a low voice.

"Yes, alone."

When the two men stood in the hall at the door of the room where Archie's sweetheart was awaiting the coming of her physician, all unconscious of who it was that stood with palpitating heart upon the threshold, the Doctor said:

"Courage, now, and do your best. If you cannot cure her I shall abandon the case. Hand her this when you go in; it will help to break the ice."

"But you are coming in with me, aren't you, Doctor?"

For answer the Doctor knocked on the door. "Come in," said a sweet, faint voice. The Doctor turned the knob, gave Archie a gentle push, and closed the door behind the young man.

* * * * *

It was not until two years afterwards that Dr. Grantley told the whole story, and by that time Mr. and Mrs. Hopkins enjoyed it as much as anyone.

The Doctor would tell with great glee how the young physician did not come out of the sick-room until two hours after he, the Doctor, had driven away, and how he would have had to walk back to town had not Mrs. Erving kept him until after tea and then sent him home herself. And how the improvement in Alida was wonderful from that day on to the following Sunday, by which time she had entirely recovered.

There was one thing, though, which the Doctor never told of his own account. He always waited for the question which was sure to come when he had apparently finished his story.

"What was on that paper which you put into Archie's hand and told him to give to Alida?"

"The paper? Oh, yes," the Doctor would reply, "I kept a copy of it—here it is," and he would fumble in his waistcoat pocket. It read: "This is my prescription. It is pleasant to take, and its efficacy is warranted. Please do not throw it out of the window."

PETER WILSON.

THE following coloured pictures will be found in the January number of the IMPERIAL NAVAL AND MILITARY ALBUM:

NAVAL.	MILITARY.
H.M.S. Northampton.	Cavalry on March.
Boys at Exercise.	Picket 1st Dragoon Guards.
Cutlass Drill.	Filling a War Balloon.
Drill at 12-pounder Hotchkiss.	Reconnoitring from a War Balloon.
Band of Northampton.	Physical Drill With Arms.
Gymnastics.	Dinner in Barrack-room.
Prepare for Cavalry.	Signalling by Heliograph.
H.M.S. Orontes.	A Field Kitchen.

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TOM'S WIDOW.

"YE-ES," said Mrs. Craig, as we sat sewing in her cosy sewing-room, "most folks notice that tidy."

The tidy in question was a nightmare vision, a combination of gaudy colours never to be found except in those horrors devised by the economical to use up "odds and ends." It was made of canvas, and bits of zephyr wool left from more ambitious pieces of work were sewn in here and there, without regard to colour, in a manner that was enough to set anybody's teeth on edge.

"Do—do you admire it?" I asked, fearful of giving offence by plain speaking.

The old lady took off her spectacles, wiped them, put them on again, leant her head on one side, and said slowly and gently in a voice mild as new milk:

"My dear, I think it is the most unutterably hideous object I ever beheld in the whole seventy years of my life. Nobody could have made that tidy but Tom's widow."

"Oh," I said, not knowing exactly how to answer, for Mrs. Craig was almost a stranger to me. My husband, a commercial traveller, had gone abroad for two months, and Mrs. Craig, an influential member of the Bilstowe congregation, had invited me to stay with her while he was away. I was very soon made to feel at home in the dear old lady's motherly care, but it is easily understood that I could know nothing of herself or her neighbours and family, except what she chose to tell me.

"You do not know who Tom's widow was, my dear," she said presently, as I stitched in respectful silence; "how should you? Tom was my son—one of my sons, I should say, for I had nine, and four daughters, though you find me alone. Some are dead, some married, but all who are living have their own homes and families. Tom went to Dublin, and started in business; he married there, and when he died it was natural for me to suppose that his widow would remain in her own home, among her own people. Tom was not thirty when he died, and I knew she was much younger. But one day, when I was grieving, as mothers will, my dear, for my son, there walked in a little mite of a figure that I should have taken for a child but for the widow's weeds. She came straight to me, lifted her veil, and, looking out of a pair of baby blue eyes straight into my face, said:

"'I am Daisy, dear mother, Tom's widow. I am all alone in the world; but Tom said he was sure if I came to you, you would be good to me.'

"I took her straight into my heart, the little, winsome darling, and loved her as my own. So, my dear, if I tell you of my trials with her, do not think it is from want of love."

I was sure it was not, for the dear old lady's voice was full of tenderness.

"It was lonely for her for one thing," said Mrs. Craig, "for her mourning, and it was a deep heart-sorrow, kept her secluded; and as there was no need for her to employ herself usefully, she began to plan delightful surprises for me. She was possessed by a very demon of fancy work. While she exercised it upon sofa cushions and footstools with distorted dogs and dislocated cats embroidered in Berlin wool upon them, I endured with patience, although my old-fashioned ideas were certainly amazed at the sums that Daisy spent on materials. Tom had left her well provided for, and as she had no expenses here, her pocket money was a very handsome income.

"As I said, I did not object to the poor little lonely child taking all the pleasure she could find in embroidering hideous designs on canvas and putting the results in the most conspicuous places in the house, but this mild form of her mania soon gave place to the desire to excel in every species of work that came up to waste the money and time of idle women. This old house, which has been in my husband's family for generations, is full of treasures endeared to us by age and association. The first piece of vandalism that I was expected to admire and secretly groaned over was the transformation of a pair of Venetian glass vases that my son Henry brought from the Continent for me. They stood in the spare room, and never was a servant allowed to touch them, the exquisite, fragile beauties.

"Imagine my horror when Daisy exultingly led me to the room and displayed her handiwork. My lovely vases! Outside each one was pasted a coloured landscape cut from a Christmas number of some journal, over which a garland of leaves was varied by bunches of grapes, currants, cherries, flowers, birds, and butterflies. Then the inside was plastered with blue paint. What was on my tongue was never spoken, for the blue eyes danced with delight at my supposed pleasure, and how could I be cross with Tom's widow?"

"Could you never get it off?" I asked pitifully.

"Never. My vases were ruined. The next really dreadful deed, varied by atrocities of minor importance, was Daisy's discovery of my great-grandmother's wedding dress, a white brocaded satin that we cherished far more than any old gold, but which Daisy ruthlessly cut into pin-cushions, embroidering each one and producing them triumphantly for a Christmas surprise. The girls were here—my girls—and my sons and their wives, and there arose such a howl as sent the wee blue-eyed mite to my arms in sheer terror.

"It was at that party that Willie Norman, whose brother is my Kate's husband, first saw Daisy. Long after the others had forgotten the pin-cushions I saw Willie in a corner with Daisy, evidently consoling her. Two babies together, my dear, though Willie is the dearest fellow! He came over very often after that (they live at Fenwood, ten miles from here), and was kind enough to discover in Daisy all sorts of latent talent for decorating everything within reach. What I suffered from their decorative mania never can be described."

"I can imagine it. I had five sisters, and we were all smitten," I said. "What started as a beauty to cover unsightly spots soon became a frenzy! My mother came to the rescue at last and scrubbed away every inch."

"Willie brought her all the designs to be found, and carried the china she decorated (?) to be baked! Oh, my dear! The tea set made in Canton for Mr. Craig's grandmother's wedding present, with gilt monograms and quaint handles to the cups, all different, was decorated, carried off by Willie, the horrible pictures all baked in,

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and then presented to me for a birthday gift. I could not tell you half, no, not the twentieth part of the dreadful destruction. You can see, dear, that the house is finished inside with oak which not a brush had even touched, but years of rubbing, waxing, and polishing have made like glass. We pride ourselves, I assure you, upon our oak finish."

"And well you may," I said. "I have admired it more than I can tell you."

"Then you can imagine my consternation when I came home, after a fortnight's visit to my daughter Marian, to find Daisy was painting the doors of the dining-room in panels. Willie had put on the first coat all over the two doors—white paint, my dear! The panels were in red, blue, green, yellow—each a different colour—and upon each a different design. Such spiky grass! Such stiff leaves, that looked as if they were cut out of tin! Such wooden birds, that looked as if their wings were held apart with a skewer! Such staring roses, flaring with red paint——"

"Such an altogether!" I quoted, as the dear old lady paused.

"Yes, my dear. I looked first at a lily of the valley that resembled snowballs on a green shutter, and then at the culprits. Willie must have read my dismay in my face, for he looked ashamed, but Daisy's lips were parted in what I presume was artistic ecstasy, her pretty cheeks were flushed with pride, her blue eyes radiant with anticipation of praise. She was Tom's widow, the little wife he had trusted to his mother's love. I kissed her tenderly, and only said:

"'You must not tire yourself so much, dear.'

"'Oh, no!' she cried with enthusiasm. 'I am going to do all the doors in the house. Isn't it beautiful?'

"I groaned in spirit, but consoled myself by hoping that some new fancy would spare my grand old oaken doors. And my hopes were verified. Daisy tired of panel painting when the dining-room was finished, and last spring I had the doors planed down. They are a little thinner, but will polish up to the old tone in time.

She came down to tea looking frightened at her own temerity.

"But after that day Willie was more cautious about her undertakings, though more devoted to her. She had been with me then nearly three years, and she had recovered from her first grief. She was very young—not twenty when Tom died—and looking like a little girl. So when she shyly ventured upon a white dress and some blue ribbons, and came down to tea looking frightened at her own temerity, I said lovingly:

"'What a pretty dress, and how pretty my Daisy looks in it!'

"'You don't think it is forgetting Tom, do you?' she asked with quivering lips.

"'I am quite sure you will never forget Tom,' I said kindly, for she was trembling all over, 'but I am sure that Tom loved you too well to wish your young life spent in mourning—even for him. It is natural for you to be joyous, dear, and nothing gives me so much pleasure as to hear you sing or smile.'

"'Ah, Tom was right when he said you would be good to me!' she said gratefully. She was a grateful little thing always.

"She had been wearing her blue ribbons for some months, when the scrap-picture and card-collecting mania set in. I bore my portion of the martyrdom as valiantly as I could. I saw a precious little Chinese jar, that was an heirloom, plastered over with butterflies and grotesque heads, and varnished, and did not faint. I endured patiently when a costly Japanese vase, a present from a dear old friend, shared the same fate; but at last the traditional straw was laid upon the camel's back."

I looked at the dear old face, lighted by a half comical twinkle of the eyes, and wondered where such angelic patience could have given way.

"One of my boys," said the old lady, "my Paul, was a surgeon in the Navy, and from every voyage he brought me treasures that became sacred when he sailed away and never returned. Amongst these doubly precious possessions was a sandal-wood table—a masterpiece of carving—with a top polished like marble. The heavy centre leg branched off into feet of carved leaves, supporting the centre, which was carved into an exquisite garland of flowers twisted round a tree trunk. But the beauty of the wood itself was the only ornament of the flat top. The table stood in a room off the parlour that was seldom used, unless we had company, and I never imagined it in any danger until, coming in rather unexpectedly from a walk, I saw Willie's head and Daisy's bent over it. I hurried into the room. Oh, my dear! The whole beautiful top was covered with hideous advertising cards, nailed on with brass-headed tacks.

"'Oh, mother,' Daisy cried, 'don't come in! It is not finished!'

"'How dare you touch that?' I cried, and then wept like a baby. 'Paul's table!' I sobbed. 'You have ruined it!'

"It was the first time I had ever spoken harshly to her, and she was like a child.

"'Oh, Willie,' she said, 'she is angry, and I thought she would be so pleased!'

"Willie was equal to the emergency. He took her into his arms, and cried in great indignation:

"'It is a shame! Don't cry, Daisy! Oh, Daisy, be my wife, and you may nail scrap-pictures on every table in my house!'

"Did you ever hear of such a proposal? Two babies, my dear. But they have been very happy, and there is not any æsthetic horror wanting in their home. Storks on one leg, reeds, sunflowers, lilies, dadoes and freizes. But there is a third baby now, nearly a year old. I expect to hear of that infant in classic costume, with a lyre in her hands, some day; but I can bear it. My responsibilities came to an end when Daisy ceased to be Tom's widow."

BASIL MANNERS.

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A BATCH OF CONFESSIONS.

"Well, sir, I understand that you have lost four hundred pounds in hard cash and bank notes; but you will excuse me if I venture to say that you have not put the facts before me quite clearly. Your natural annoyance at the loss of the money has so upset you that you are——"

"Annoyance!" interrupted the head of the firm. "Why it's four months' profit! I'm more than annoyed. What's the good of making a long rigmarole about it? You are a detective and are put on this case. There is only one person who could have done it; do your duty and arrest him!"

Detective-Sergeant Dodds coughed drily.

"We do not go altogether by what is probable," he observed, "It sometimes happens that the most likely man to have committed a crime is just the one who did not do it."

"Well, the facts are these," replied Mr. Robert Jennings, trading as "Jennings and Co.," as it was usually recorded on legal documents. "Yesterday afternoon I received a wire to the effect that a certain transaction—an ordinary one in my business, although not occuring very often—was completed, and I must be prepared to pay cash by ten o'clock this morning. It was just too late to get a cheque cashed. I had only a few pounds here, so after some trouble I managed to get a business friend or two to make up the amount by honouring my cheques. It was placed in my safe, and only two of us knew that the money was in the office—myself and my chief clerk, Henry Garrard, who has the duplicate key of the safe.

"Although I had perfect confidence in Garrard, I had a feeling of impending trouble when I got up this morning, and I left home for the office earlier than usual, arriving here at nine o'clock exactly. Garrard gets here a little after nine, but this morning he was already in the office when I arrived, and I saw at once that something was wrong. I soon learnt that the money had been stolen."

"Were there signs of disturbance?" asked the detective, as the other paused.

"None at all, for the simple reason that the safe had been opened with a key. It's as clear as daylight against him, and I can't see why you want all these details."

"Did you find anything incriminating about the office?"

"After he had absconded—but I suppose you want it all in proper order. I soon taxed him with the robbery, but he denied it. He was terribly upset and looked as guilty as a man could look. I was beside myself with anxiety, and while I was tearing my hair in my little private office and looking blankly at the safe as though it was some horrible dream, he was off. After he was gone, this packet of unpaid bills was found on the floor of the outer room, close to the recess where he hung his coat and hat."

The detective took the packet and glanced at the bills; then he put them into his pocket.

"I know that a man has been sent to his house to arrest Garrard, but he had, of course, not returned. I should like to have a look round the offices," said Dodds in a matter-of-fact way.

He made an apparently superficial examination of the place, but his keen eyes took in everything, even to the appearance of the two clerks and the office boy. He stooped down when near the safe, and picked up a shred of dress-material.

"You employ a woman to clean the offices?" he inquired.

"They are swept and dusted by the boy," replied Mr. Jennings. "A woman comes once a week, but she wasn't here last night."

"And you don't employ a lady clerk?"

"No. What have you found?"

"It looks like a piece of a woman's dress," was the reply of the detective as he placed the shred carefully in his pocket-book. "There seems to be more in this than you suppose, Mr. Jennings. You see, the most probable solution of a problem is not always a correct one."

"On the contrary, this discovery, and the finding of the bills, tend to prove Garrard's guilt, detective," rejoined Mr. Jennings, somewhat testily. "I believe him to be most respectable, but I hear this morning that he has a very extravagant wife. The bills confirm that—they are all from establishments for ladies' things, and the totals are certainly high for a man in his position. That shred, however, suggests some other form of expense."

"But did he stay here after the others had gone?"

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"Oh, yes, he often stayed late to keep the work up."

"For which he received extra pay, naturally, and so increased his income?" remarked Dodds. He knew that it was not so—Jennings & Co. had a reputation for being anything but liberal, but he said that to have a sly dig at the principal. The latter pretended not to hear it.

"Well, sir, I think I have all the information you can give me and I will work it up. By the way, though, did you have a call for the money this morning?"

"Yes," said Jennings, "and paid it. Had to keep the man till the Bank was opened."

"Ah!" ejaculated Dodds. "Well, I'll get to the bottom of this for you, Mr. Jennings."

"Get me my money back, and I'll give you ten pounds," cried the gentleman.

"You are very liberal, sir," was the quiet answer. "But I am paid by the authorities for doing my work, thank you!"

And he went off.

An hour later, Dodds was in the best room of the apartments occupied by the Garrards. In front of him stood Mrs. Garrard, her pretty face flushed and anxious, and presenting a strange contrast to the quiet, composed features of Detective-Sergeant Dodds. She had her hand upon the handle of the door as though to prevent him from passing into another room.

"It is quite useless for you to attempt to interfere with the course of the law, Mrs. Garrard," said Dodds, in a not unkindly tone. "Besides, I think you will find it in your husband's interest to further my inquiries."

"You have come to arrest him," she answered, her voice trembling with agitation. "You cannot call that 'in his interest.'"

"You say he is ill in bed; still, I must see him. And, as you must know, you can do nothing. However," added the detective as a thought struck him, "perhaps you can answer a few of the questions and so throw light on the mystery and spare Mr. Garrard some trouble. Sit down."

The wife reluctantly released her hold on the door-handle, and sat down on a chair opposite the officer.

"You know from what I have already told you," began Dodds, "that appearances are dead against your husband. There is reason to believe that he has been very extravagant of late, and it is a fact that he has been pressed for money. I have evidence here" (he drew out the packet of bills) "which confirms it."

"Let me see the bills," she cried, holding out her hand for them. "But these bills give no particulars of what they are for," she added, after a glance at them.

"No," replied Dodds. "They are what are called 'statements'; that is, they are reminders that goods have not been paid for. But you see that they are from establishments for ladies' things."

Mrs. Garrard's face, which had lost some of its colour during the conversation, now became red again. Her hand trembled as she gave them back to the detective, but she said nothing.

"There is—hem!—another piece of evidence, which—Can you throw any light on this fact? I found a shred of the material of a lady's dress near the safe in the office." And he held it up before her eyes.

"Yes," she rejoined in a decided manner. "It is mine."

The detective prided himself on being able to hide his feelings under any conditions, but he nearly betrayed his surprise in this instance. He had not expected this development.

"I was in the office last night," continued Mrs. Garrard. "I have been there occasionally when my husband has had to stop late—which is very often. I helped him to put the books away last night."

Dodds looked straight in her eyes as though he would read her soul. Her eyes dropped.

"You are aware that you have the reputation of being an expensive wife for a man in Mr. Garrard's position," he said, his eyes still fixed upon her. "Did you know that the money was in the safe?"

"No, she didn't!" said a voice at the door.

Henry Garrard pushed it open and walked in.

"You may spare yourself any further trouble, officer," he said as he stretched out his hands. "I have heard

She had her hand upon the handle of the door.

most of what you have said. I confess to having taken the money in order to pay those bills and meet other expenses. The temptation was too great for me. Put on the handcuffs and take me away."

Both his wife and the officer had risen at his entrance; the former uttered an agonised cry, "Oh, Harry!" while the latter shrugged his shoulders and mechanically drew forth the manacles.

Garrard, standing in the centre of the room, presented the appearance of a man just able to leave his bed after a severe illness. It seemed incredible that a man could alter so in the space of a few hours. He had great difficulty in keeping on his feet, his eyes were sunken in their sockets and bloodshot, his face was without a vestige of colour. Dodds put the handcuffs back again; there would be no trouble with this man.

"Take this chair while I send for a cab," he said. Then he turned to the window and beckoned to an officer on the other side of the street.

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When Dodds turned round, he found the self-accused man reclining limply in an easy chair and his wife pacing up and down the room wringing her hands. The detective glanced from one to the other with a dubious expression.

"I must take him," he breathed to himself, "but I don't believe that confession! I should be more inclined to believe a confession from *her*. I'll sift this to the bottom or my name's not Joshua!"

As though she divined his thoughts, Mrs. Garrard stopped short and faced him boldly.

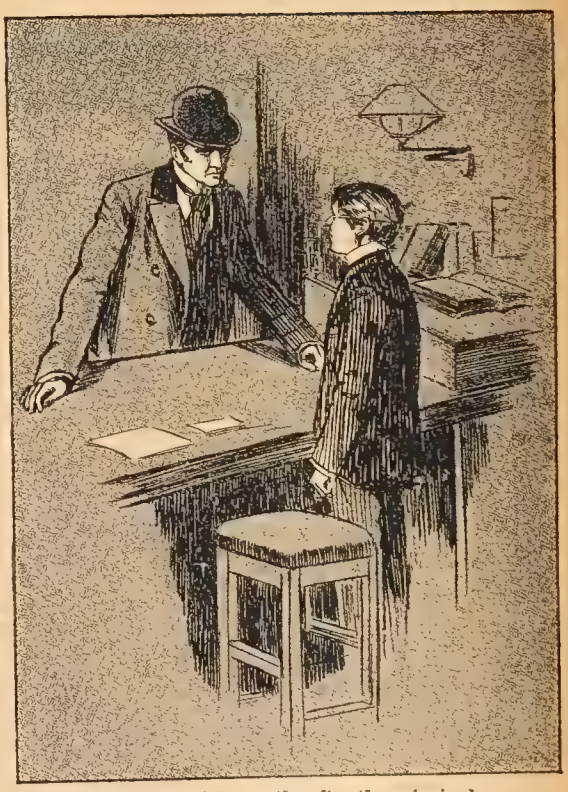
"It is on me that you must put the handcuffs, detective," she said in a voice that was firm, almost defiant. "*I* took the money; my husband knows nothing about the theft and has told a lie to save me. I have been an extravagant woman; I have been fond of dress and pleasure above my station; and I took advantage of my knowledge and my opportunity to rob the safe while pretending to assist him last night. Heaven help me! I have brought ruin and misery on him and on myself!"

The wretched woman fell on her knees and buried her face in her hands.

One glance at Garrard was sufficient to convince the officer that the man's confession was a lie, that he had uttered it to save his wife. There was no need to put the question to him, but Dodds did it unconsciously.

"Then what you have said is untrue. You were trying to shield your wife?"

The wretched woman fell on her knees.



He inquired pleasantly after the principal.

"Yes," responded Garrard feebly, "I told a lie; I know nothing of the robbery. This is killing me."

At that moment there was a knock at the door, and another plain-clothes officer entered and informed Dodds that the cab was waiting. Dodds instructed his subordinate to do what he could for Garrard, who had fainted at the thought of his wife's being taken away, and then went off with his prisoner.

Detective-Sergeant Dodds was not comfortable about the safe robbery at the offices of Jennings & Co. Mrs. Garrard had been up before the magistrate and remanded after some formal evidence had been given. She had refused to say where the money had been secreted, although Mr. Jennings had promised not to press the case if she would do so.

In the pursuit of his investigations, Dodds had made a disquieting discovery; he had been to the establishments whose names were on the statements found in the office, and in every case he had been informed that there was something wrong, that there was no account in the name of Garrard, paid or unpaid.

"If we have supplied Mr. or Mrs. Garrard with goods, it has been a cash transaction," was the tenour of the replies he had received.

In three cases, for the three largest sums, the statements were declared to be fictitious; the handwriting was unknown; the forms must have been fraudulently obtained and the entries made up.

"There is something deeper in this than I at first supposed," muttered the detective. "But what about the confessions? Is it a got-up affair in which these two are engaged with someone else? I can't see the point

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of that, though. Any way, there's something deep in it, and you've got to make it clear, J. Dodds."

How was it with the four other forms — for small amounts — which made up the packet? Dodds turned into a restaurant where he was known, took a seat at a corner table, and examined the spot on the statements covered by the name "Garrard." An attentive examination with his pocket microscope showed that some other name had been obliterated by means of a chemical substance and the "Garrard," written in imitation of the rest of the handwriting. There was no difficulty about the obliteration; from time to time such chemical substances are hawked about offices for sale to clerks.

"If I go back to these shops and ask them to run through their accounts and find out to whom these bills were made out," mused the officer, "they will do it, but they will think I was silly not to have thought of it before. And it must be admitted, Joshua Dodds Esq., that you have been a little dull in this case! Then, it will take time, and perhaps the name will not reveal anything after all. What's at the bottom of it? I suppose I must go back to these establishments and then to Jennings & Co. Perhaps I had better go to the firm first? Yes. I will."

"That will do," cried Dodds warningly.

When Dodds reached the offices of Jennings & Co. he found that the office boy was in charge. He inquired pleasantly after the principal and was informed that his movements were uncertain; whereupon it occurred to him that he would wait a little. So he walked up and down the office and entered into conversation with the boy, who was quite pleased at the great man's condescension. When Detective-Sergeant Joshua Dodds left the building fifteen or twenty minutes later, he was whistling softly in a way that indicated either pleasure or surprise.

"Some persons say that detectives would never find out anything if chance did not help them," he soliloquised as he stepped out briskly. "It is true that we are assisted a great deal by something that may be so styled, but *I* say it's Providence. Why did I go there first? Chance? Not a bit of it! It was quite providential. It is Providence that makes such fine smart men as myself join the force; it must be, for there's precious little to induce us to join. It is all arranged so that justice shall be done. And *I* will see that it is done in this case!"

He visited each of the four establishments and soon placed the book-keepers on the track of the account he wanted. Yes, the account agreed with the statement in his possession in all four instances.

Dodds was busy paying visits for an hour and a half, and when he had completed his round he went straight to the offices of Jennings and Co.

Mr. Jennings was in. He was about to depart for the day, but he took off his hat and coat and bade the officer welcome.

"I suppose you have got no nearer finding my money?" he asked moodily.

"Yes, I have. That's the object of my visit," returned Dodds.

"O-oh! Indeed!" Jennings' voice was somewhat shaky and he looked anxiously at the detective.

"You don't appear very pleased, Mr. Jennings," remarked Dodds quietly.

"Yes, I am," said Jennings, recovering himself. "But I was so surprised."

"So was I."

"Where—I mean, what have you learnt?"

"This," replied the officer, shutting the door and locking it. "Three hundred pounds of the money was paid into the Longton Bank the morning after the robbery, to the account of Richard Jackson, which names begin with the same letters as Robert Jennings. Isn't it funny that when people assume other names, they usually take names with the same initials as their own? Have you ever noticed that, Mr. Jennings? The other hundred pounds was paid into the same bank this morning. You find it handy to keep a special private account at another bank, and in another name, so that nobody shall know anything about it, do you not?"

The head of the firm of Jennings & Co. had sat like one in a daze, while the officer had been speaking. He now jumped up with a terrible curse.

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"That will do," cried Dodds warningly, his hand going to a pocket in his waistcoat. "It's all up. I've discovered the whole of your little game. You have played and lost, so you must take the consequences."

Jennings sank back in his chair with a groan.

"The only thing which isn't clear to me is, why you were villain enough to try to fix the crime on Garrard; why you didn't arrange it in some other way. But that doesn't matter, now that I can clear those wretched people."

Finding that he was caught without hope of escape, Jennings broke down entirely and made a clean breast of it. He had been speculating and had lost. He had speculated partly with a sum of three hundred and fifty pounds which he held as treasurer for a local fund, and he must show that he held it, three or four days from the date of the robbery. He had that sum of money in his "office" bank (as Dodds styled it), but that was really wanted to pay an overdue account on the morrow, or his credit would be gone. In his despair at the loss, which had been made known to him that very morning, he hastily concocted a scheme, and to carry it out he had sacrificed Garrard. He had placed the statements in the office; he had obtained the three fictitious forms and had altered the name on the others, which were genuine ones made out to himself. He knew Garrard's difficulty with his wife, who had occasionally bought goods without his knowledge. He fastened the crime on Garrard because this plan required it, and that scheme was the best he could evoke.

"It was rather a clumsy plot," said the detective, "but circumstances helped you wonderfully. I never suspected you; you played your part very well in front of me. You see the advantage of being agreeable. If I had not been agreeable to your office boy I should never have drawn from him permission to see the little bottle of stuff for erasing ink marks and mistakes which you kept in your desk. He volunteered the information when I asked casually if any of the clerks ever used such stuff. And if I hadn't peeped into your desk, I shouldn't have seen the other bill which you had forgotten to put with the rest, nor the half of the cheque which you had drawn on the Longton Bank and then torn in halves. Why didn't you destroy those things? Because Providence helps us detectives to discover crime."

Jennings having made a clean breast of it, Mrs. Garrard was released. Jennings himself evaded justice by suicide.

The confessions were easily explained. Garrard thought his wife had committed the robbery to satisfy her love of dress and gaiety, and had determined to suffer in her stead, and so save her; whereas Mrs. Garrard, believing that he had done it for her sake, and because she had taunted him many times with not having a better position, decided in her remorse to take the crime upon herself.

"Well," said Dodds to them, when it was all over, "I never had a case with so many confessions before, and I shall be very careful of confessions after this! Now, Mrs. Garrard, I hope this trial will be a lesson to you. You've got a good husband; be contented!"

That is three years ago, and there is good evidence that the lesson has been taken to heart.

G. E. LINGEN.

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THE TECHNIQUE OF PROPOSING.

YOUNG KENDALL walked along the street rather less briskly than usual. His hopes were blighted for ever. He had just asked a girl to marry him and had been rejected. She was a nice girl; he had known her for three years, and for two of them he had been, in his subconsciousness, looking forward to this day—not this day as it had turned out, but as it ought to have turned out.

When he came to Knightsbridge he paused an instant, debating whether to go down to his club, or into the Park. For some reason the club seemed to offer fewer attractions than usual, and he concluded to go into the Park.

It was a perfect January day, clear and crisp. There were more carriages in the Park than usual, and Kendall knew a good many of the occupants. As he recognised the various familiar faces and raised his hat in acknowledgment of the different smiles of greeting directed his way, it occurred to him how self-possessed women always were; how self-possessed *she* was, while he was all tangled up in his rhetoric and oratory. He seated himself absently on one of the chairs provided for the delectation of weary pilgrims, and, regardless of Park regulations, began to flip off with his cane the ends of some of the prescribed twigs near by; his face reddened again as he recalled her coolness and composure when he had intimated that her refusal struck the sun from his heaven and made his future a blank.

"It's delightful to sit down for a little and cool off, after walking in this sultry weather, don't you think?" said a fresh, cordial young voice at his elbow; and, turning, he became aware of the fact that Hope Brewster had taken the vacant place beside him, and was smiling at him out of her frank, clear eyes, a disarming smile that he could not resent even in his present mood of cynical dejection. Hope was different from the other girls, more original, independent and individual. She had grown up with boys and could do all the things they could. She did things now that a girl of a less secure social position could not have dared to do; the "Miss Brewster" part of her name covered the multitude of little sins against the conventionalities which were committed by "Hope." She was a girl whom the young men all liked, but never made love to. She sat beside Kendall now as naturally and unconcernedly as if she had been a fellow member of one of his clubs. She wore a military coat with a turned-up collar, and a sailor hat that always had a jaunty look on her bright head.

"Isn't it a beautiful day?" she inquired invitingly, gazing with interest at the passers-by.

"Fine," assented Kendall, with the enthusiasm of the menagerie polar bear in July.

"Lots of people out," pursued the young lady cheerfully, tapping her small boots briskly on the path to keep up circulation.

"Lots," agreed Kendall, without manifesting a disproportionate degree of warmth on the subject.

"You don't seem to be very pleased this afternoon. Has anything gone wrong?" was Miss Hope's next venture, as she turned and faced him, giving him the benefit of one of her direct glances.

"You are mistaken," said her companion, with some stiffness. "I was never in better spirits in my life."

Hope smiled at him.

"They seem like good spirits," she observed; "the mirth and hilarity exhibited by the plumes on a hearse. I'll tell you what I believe the trouble with you is, Jack, You have been proposing to Madeline Arnold, and she has refused you!"

If Kendall had not come of a warrior race, he would have been unable to stand this sudden audacious fire without flinching. But blood will tell, when it is really blood and not simply the colourless sap of hypothetic pedigree trees, and the young man did not turn renegade at the first danger signal.

"What makes you think so?" he inquired, with a passable show of indifference.

"Why," explained Hope, nothing daunted, "it's one of those things that come by intuition. I can't tell you any reason. I simply know that nothing short of being a rejected suitor could possibly bring you to the dismal pass I see you in to-day. And when we got that far, the rest is plain sailing; for every one has known for a year and more that your heavenly constellations have risen and set in a certain house not far from here, and that to all other luminaries you are totally blind. She's a lovely girl, Jack. She's my best friend, and I am on your side. Now what made her refuse you?"

"Why, of course," said Kendall, yielding to the superior tactics of the enemy with something like relief; for, after all, there was a melancholy comfort in talking to a sympathetic and comprehending soul like this. "Why, of course, I'm not half good enough for her, and——"

"Well, you knew that before, didn't you?" interrupted Miss Hope sharply; "and yet you went on and asked her just the same. You thought she would give you a different answer. You know you did."

"I hoped—" began Kendall correctingly.

"Precisely. You hoped she was not averse to you, and every one else thought so. I thought so. The course of true love progresses with ideal smoothness up to the point of to-day, and then everything suddenly goes to pieces without warning. There must be some reason for this, and I can think of only one that is tenable; you must have done it the wrong way."

"Done it the wrong way?" repeated Kendall stupidly. "Done what wrong?"

"The asking, of course. You must have gone at it in some senseless way that spoilt everything. I haven't a doubt of it myself," and Hope smiled blandly at some one she knew in a carriage that was passing, and looked as if she were saying something quite different.

"But," protested the young man, roused by various considerations and inferences to indignant combativeness, "granting what you seem so sure of, that I have made a fool of myself, you don't mean to tell me that a moment's stupidity, a casual blunder, would upset a girl's entire opinion of a man? That is a little too much, Miss Hope, even from you!"

"It does seem queer," Hope admitted candidly; "but you know we women aren't always swayed by reason, but often by that indefinable thing which is called by all sorts of names, from intuition to impulse. It is a really serious matter to say the words that mean one is going to marry a man, you know; and the moment before she says them, a girl sees all the *cons* a great

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deal more plainly than she ever did before in her life. And if, just at that juncture, a man doesn't act and speak in exactly the way that appeals to that particular girl's nature, why, it's all up with him and with her, too, before they know it. I haven't a doubt that you did it quite as you shouldn't have done it for Madeline. For instance, you probably intimated to her, more than once, that you were utterly unworthy even to open her carriage door for her; didn't you?"

"Well, naturally, since it is true——"

"And that she is the only girl on earth you have ever looked at, or ever will look at, or that you can imagine any one else wishing to look at, for all time?"

"Why shouldn't I have said so? She probably knew it, at any rate."

"And that the reason for this is self-evident, because she is so superior, so thoughtful, so deep, so literary, so transcendently different, in short, from all the rest of human kind?"

"She is all that and a great deal more, and I am glad I told her my opinion."

"And doubtless you added that without her your future would be empty and colourless, your life a complete wreck, eternity itself a matter of indifference to you."

"Now, look here," said young Kendall, growing unpleasantly warm even in the sharp air of midwinter. "I don't know how you can guess all this, unless you have had it tried on yourself, and I'm not saying it is what happened at all. But whatever took place is over and past, and all there is now for me is to brace up and get used to it. There is nothing to be gained by talking about it any further. Shall we walk on?"

"Oh, yes, there is use," said his companion sweetly. "It isn't every man that is fortunate enough, when he has made a mistake, to have a girl to help him out of it. I mean to help you, Jack. I want you to go round and do it again."

"Do it again?" he gasped, feeling all his powers of speech reduced to a weak repetition of her words. "Do it again, Hope?"

"Yes, in the right way. Now let me tell you your mistake. You were too subservient. You made her everything and yourself nothing. You deified her until she couldn't help thinking there must be something in it, and wondering if, perhaps, she might not be this creature of fire and soul you depicted. You made her lose her perspective, and then, instead of erecting your own image in corresponding statuesque proportions, you actually made light of yourself. You were not strong enough, for, don't you see, a woman doesn't want a little or humble person to be the one to whom she gives so much. She wants him to love and revere her, it is true, but he must be head and shoulders above her, at the same time. Probably, also, you were nervous and embarrassed and awkward. You ought to have been calm and self-possessed and dignified. Nothing conveys the idea of weakness so much as nervousness; and a woman will forgive anything sooner than weakness. In a word, you should have offered to take her, instead of pleading to be taken by her. Do you see? You were in the wrong part. You were not true to yourself nor to real manhood, and she divined it with that something in her woman's nature which will act as an attracting or repelling force all her life long."

"I believe you are right. Upon my word, I do," said her listener rather heavily. "But what is done is done, and nothing can undo it."

"Nothing can undo your bad quarter of an hour; but pluck and energy may give you a good one. What you must do is to go straight back there and begin over again. Yes," added Hope hastily, seeing the dissent in his face and attitude, "that will introduce such an element of novelty and originality that if she cares for you—mind, I say if she cares—she will be taken off her feet, and you will have it all your own way. If she really doesn't care for you, matters will be no worse than they are now. Will you do it?"

Hope spoke eagerly, and the glow and fervour of her enthusiasm produced a corresponding warmth in her companion. He thought for a moment, then said, in the firm, deliberate accent Columbus might have used when he announced his intention of discovering America:

"Yes, I'll do it."

"Good!" exclaimed Hope. "Now be sure you get into the right frame of mind this time. Take it for granted that she cares for you; remember that you are worth a good deal yourself, and that a great many people think there is no one like you. Finally, if she refuses you absolutely—I don't think she will, but you can never be utterly sure of what a woman will do—let her see that you are a strong, self-reliant man, who is, it is true, deeply disappointed, but who will go out from her presence and continue to build his life, clean and true and upright, a life which is to be, quite independently of her, worth while. Do you feel this way, Jack?"

"Well, I believe I could act the part. Ah, by the way, Miss Hope, supposing I practise up a bit on you?"

"On me?" It was Hope's turn to repeat words.

"Yes, so that you can see if I've the right idea and could carry it out properly, you know. You've got me into this thing, and you might as well see if I'm in correct trim to make a success of it."

"Well," said Hope doubtfully, "of course if it will help you at all. Go ahead; I'll be Madeline. What will you say when she comes into the reception-room?"

"I shall say; 'Excuse me for coming again, Miss Arnold, but I found, on going away, that I had forgotten something.'"

"Oh, did you leave something here?" asked Hope's Miss Arnold, in chilling tones. They seemed to put the breath of life into Kendall's courage, and his voice rang out with manly decision.

"Yes, I left you here and the answer I want. I think the first part of this afternoon was a bad dream, and I've come back to have you awaken me, and tell me so. There's no use, Madeline. I will not have 'no' for an answer."

Kendall had forgotten Hope, and was gazing into space with fire and determination in his face.

"I think we finished all that a little while ago, Mr. Kendall. If you haven't anything else to say to me, perhaps I had better leave you (I've got to be cold for her.)"

"So you will not leave me until you have heard me tell you in full all the reasons why you were wrong in giving me the answer you did before," said Kendall firmly. "In the first place, you are all the world to me. In the second place, I know that you—oh, never mind any more, Miss Hope; I can't do it to you, after all; but I can see exactly how it goes, and I am just in the mood for it. Of course that is the way to meet her, bless her. I was a fool for acting so like a cowardly cad before. Any woman would despise it. I think I'll go there at once, Miss Hope, if you don't mind. Are you walking my way?"

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"No," said Hope, rising with him and adjusting herself to the sudden quickstep in the march of events. "I'm going up by the Serpentine. Good-bye, Jack, and good luck to you." And she smiled and nodded encouragingly at him as they shook hands at parting.

Kendall walked rapidly away, his head up and his shoulders well back. He had not noticed before how perfect his surroundings were. The exquisite colouring of the wintry sky brought out to full advantage the grace of the tree forms silhouetted against it; everything seemed to smile good cheer at him; even the palatial "mansions" and shops wore a face of kindliness and substantial comfort; they seemed like encouraging friends, beckoning him on.

His feeling of hope and confidence amounted almost to conviction that he was walking straight upon success. Truth to tell, however, it was not until he stood face to face with the familiar doors, and had mechanically touched the unassuming but portentious bell push that the full realisation of his act took possession of him. Then, nothing but his sturdy warrior blood kept him from precipitate flight; it was aided and abetted by the fact that the door was almost instantly opened; and he entered the house like one walking up to a cannon's mouth in a nightmare.

He was conscious of a singular lack of equilibrium, both physical and mental, to which his nervousness of the earlier part of the afternoon was a trifling matter; he was annoyed to find that he had an unusual sensation in the region of the bronchial tubes, and, to rid himself of it, cleared his throat once or twice in a careless, matter-of-fact way; he tried not to let himself get out of that proper frame of mind, which Hope had said was so important, and kept assuring himself encouragingly that if he could only begin all right, he should sail through surprisingly well, as he had done in the Park, to which end he repeated several times the first sentences he had used in his recent rehearsal.

Then he began to wonder why she did not come down, and convinced that he had been waiting an inordinate length of time, a sudden wild gleam of hope shot across his sky—perhaps she was not at home. He was just pulling himself together at this thought, when the heavy curtains at the door were pushed aside, and she entered.

"Excuse me for coming again, Miss Arnold," he repeated with punctilious preciseness, gazing haughtily at the opposite wall, "but I found on getting away that I had forgotten something."

"Oh, did you leave something here?" inquired the young lady, in a voice which, not altogether steady, seemed to accord with a certain unusual expression in her eyes. Kendall, for the first time in all their intercourse, not noticing her, owing to his sudden absorbing interest in a beautiful etching near him, realised that this was the moment to take the citadel by storm, and answered, with all the eloquence he could at the moment command:

"Yes; when I got away, I began to think I—to realise that when I was here—that two hours ago—to feel sure that after all—if you would give me the opportunity and not be too hard on me—in short" (with a desperate spurt) "to determine that I would come back and tell you that I"—his eyes, having left the etching, had fallen upon a small table across the room; Heaven is said to help those who help themselves, and Kendall's mettle had been proved—"that I had left my note-book here!" he finished in triumph, walking to the table and possessing himself of the little leather-bound article of such stragetic importance.

"Oh," said Miss Arnold, in a strange tone, drawing a quick breath. "Did you come back for that? I should have sent it to you when it was discovered; but perhaps you needed it at once?"

"I—yes; I needed it this afternoon," replied Kendall, feeling a great load off his mind, and speaking almost easily. "It contains some figures I wished to use at the club, and of course that reminded me of it."

"I am sorry you have been so inconvenienced," she said, somewhat laboriously. "It is a long distance to the club. Isn't it very cold for walking?"

"Better for walking than for driving, I should say," he responded, pocketing his note-book and moving towards the door; "I actually pitied those girls in the Park. They showed pluck, never a white feather, but they must have been freezing. I have yet to see a physical discomfort that a girl can't face if it is necessary in order for her to do the correct thing."

"The Park?" repeated Madeline. "You surely haven't been to the Park, too, in this short time?"

"Oh—" Kendall hesitated; "well, yes; I went there on the way."

Then, having reached the door, and wishing to avoid opportunity for what he would have called further "breaks," he turned to say adieu. Madeline's response was oddly irrelevant.

"Are you sure," she said in a strained, unnatural manner, and with apparent effort, "sure that you haven't anything else to say?"

"Well, I can't think of anything more," said Kendall amiably, in whose breast a great relief at having passed his ordeal had made every other feeling subordinate; "it was awfully stupid of me to forget my note-book, and I am sorry to have troubled you; that's all. I will promise not to do it again," and he turned once more to go.

"Oh," cried Madeline, in a voice that was a wail, as she sank despairingly upon a couch and buried her head among the cushions, "then you don't care for me after all!"

* * * * *

"And do you know, Jack," she was saying to him a quarter of an hour later, when they were both sitting on the couch, and she had abandoned the cushions, "five minutes after I had been so horrid to you, and you had gone, I was crying my heart out, and willing to give worlds to have you back. Only I knew you would never ask me again. And Hope Brewster dropped in, and I was too miserable to fabricate, so I told her all about it. She said she was sure it would turn out all right, but you see I knew you better, and I assured her you would never give me another chance—never. And the facts have proved I was right, for I had to do the second proposing myself, didn't I? Won't Hope be surprised when she knows it all!"

"And wouldn't you be surprised if you knew it all?" reflected Kendall, as he looked down contentedly into the face of the "dearest girl in the world." "Yes, of the trio, I am the only one who knows all the sides, and who is not in for surprises."

But he would have been the most surprised of any of them had he at that moment seen, at a lonelier spot along the Serpentine, a certain lonely little figure standing, a drooping, girlish figure in a military coat with a turned-up collar, and a sailor hat which had lost its usual jauntiness, for the bright head was resting dejectedly on the iron railing, and the girl was weeping as though her heart would break.

ESTHER NOANES.

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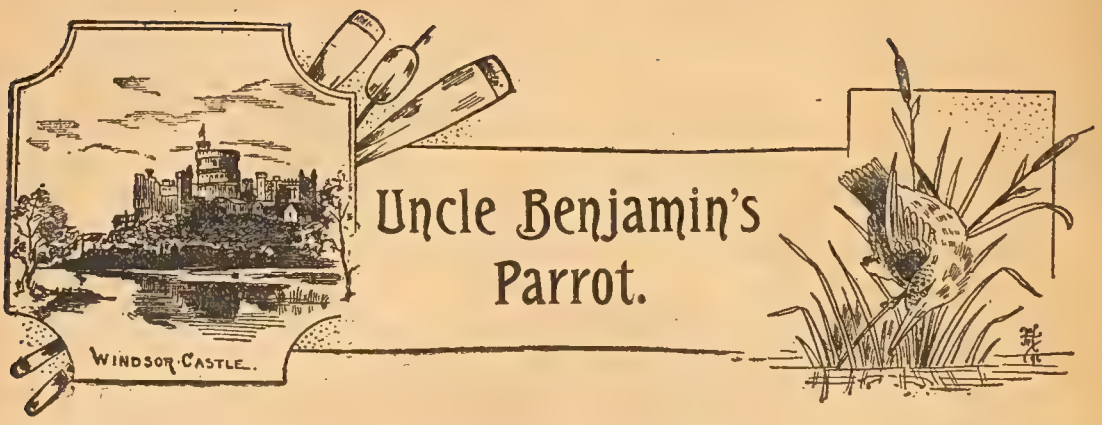

Uncle Benjamin's Parrot.

It was getting late in the evening of the third day before Christmas, when there came a violent pull at our front-door bell, and on the door being opened Uncle Benjamin, covered with snow and out of breath from fighting against the wind, entered. "Oh, what weather! What weather!" he puffed and gasped as he kicked off his wet goloshes, and recklessly scattered the snow from his overcoat on the clothes which were hanging in the hall. "I should so like a cup of coffee. It wouldn't disturb you too much to make me one, would it?"

Of course it didn't disturb us, no more did Uncle Benjamin, who was soon snugly installed in a comfortable seat by the fire.

"Oh, uncle, shut your eyes!" cried my wife suddenly. "Your Christmas present is lying there on the table near you. How could I be so careless! Please don't look that way."

He did as requested—shut his kindly little eyes, and waited patiently until my wife said: "Now, all right."

"How kind of you to think of a present for me," he said. "One good turn deserves another, and I want to give you something, too, but I'll be hanged if I know what."

For a short time he sat with his head in his hands looking fixedly in front of him. Then all at once, bringing his fist down on the table, he said:

"If I only had that parrot I should be all right!"

"Parrot?" I asked astonished. "What parrot are you talking about?"

Uncle Benjamin looked at me jovially.

"Don't you know the story? Really? Well, then, you shall hear it. But first of all give me another cup of coffee. You are a well-read man, nephew, so you ought to know there is nothing like a good cup of coffee and a good luncheon to set a man talking."

When the beverage was ready and Uncle Benjamin had thoroughly tested it by several hearty draughts and had then expressed his satisfaction, he began his story:

"It happened several years ago. After much hoping and waiting, Christmas Day had finally arrived. For several days before a continual stream of presents from relatives and friends had been steadily flowing in, while on Christmas morning quite a number of folks to whom I had scarcely given a thought sent me kindly remembrances, so that I felt proud and happy, and I said to myself: 'Benjamin, my boy, you must be rather a nice sort of fellow, after all, if these people are so fond of you as to send you Christmas presents.' I had already arranged with mother (for she was living then) how we would pile up all the presents under the Christmas tree in the evening—you know, all reasonable people become children at Christmas—when another present was brought in. It was from a man whom I had not seen for years, and whom I had thought of very seldom—my friend, Karl Kierbaum, who was in America. What in the world prompted him to send me anything I could not for the life of me imagine; still less how a man who was in general so reasonable, could send me a parrot, the ugliest bird in creation. The one which I got was the ugliest of its kind, and was, in addition, an ill-tempered, ill-behaved bird. It began by biting my finger, and as soon as it was taken out of the cage, set to work to destroy the carpet.

"I hate all birds, except those which are roasted, of course; then I like them well enough when the gravy is all right. Well, how could I be expected to fall in love with that hateful specimen, which screeched the sharpest words and behaved like a lagan? My wife naturally thought it a dear little thing, and would have been delighted to have it in the bedroom, just like children with their Christmas toys. But I insisted that the parrot should either be taken into the cellar or else chained in the dog kennel. In the latter place it might at least have served to warn its lord and master of approaching danger, like the geese of the Capitol. My wife objected that the parrot would freeze and that it would be brutal to cause the death of the poor, harmless creature. That I finally admitted, but maintained that it should not be housed in the bedroom.

"'Well,' said my wife finally, 'what shall we do?'

"'Can't the bird be roasted?' I asked.

"Upon which my dear better half threatened to lay the case before the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, so I saw that it would be necessary to find some other way out of the difficulty. At noon an inspiration came to me.

"'Mother,' I called, 'I have it! We'll wrap the parrot up carefully in paper, and send it to Director Striegel. I will write a note, telling him how honoured I feel at being able to send him a trifling present, which I hope he will accept, as the bird is of rare species. He will be sure to be flattered by the little attention, and we shall be able to get rid of the bird with credit, for to give, you know, is better than to receive.'

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"With tearful eyes my wife took leave of the dear, sweet little parrot, which had managed to break a vase before we could capture it. I comforted her by saying that she would be able to see the bird again when she called on the frau director. Then our maid Bertha set out with it, and half-an-hour later came back with a very nice note: 'My dear sir,' it ran, 'the acceptance of your kind present, just received, gives me the greatest pleasure. For a long time it has been my great desire to possess a parrot. I had not bought one because I never found one pretty enough for me. I never saw such a beauty as the one you have so kindly sent me, for which I hereby thank you most heartily.'

"'So you see, mother,' I said, 'what is an owl to one is a nightingale to another.'

"Christmas night arrived. It is always such a peculiar time. The older a man gets the more uncertain he feels whether it is going to bring him happiness or misfortune. Mother and I had exchanged presents and sat hand in hand in front of the sparkling Christmas fire. Neither of us spoke; we were both busy with our thoughts. At such times one wonders if it will be the last time that one will sit so; if not, perhaps a year later one or the other will be resting quietly under the sod.

"Our reveries were interrupted by a sharp ring at the bell, and almost immediately the servant entered the room, carrying a very strange-looking parcel and a note.

"'Mr. Ibsen's compliments. He has sent you a Christmas present.'

"'I must confess I am curious to know what it can be,' I said to my wife, who was busy taking the wrappers off. Then I opened the note and read: 'Dear Benjamin, will you accept the accompanying trifling present? After a great deal of searching I finally unearthed the parrot, which I am sending you. The dealer assures me that it is an exceptionally fine bird. I know that you are very fond of parrots, and hope you will be pleased to have this one.'

"'Confound it all!' I roared in a rage, 'what the dickens do people mean by sending me parrots? What can I do with the bird? I'll tell you what. I'll send it over to the director just as it is in the cage. He'll be glad to have the pair. That's what I'll do.'

"So again I wrote a few words. The dealer from whom I had bought a parrot in the morning, had, by chance, received a second and similar bird, which he had at once offered me. It gave me great pleasure to ask him to accept the parrot which I was sending him.

"Bertha went again, and returned with the message that the director was so overjoyed with the present, that he was absolutely unable to find words in which to express his thanks. He would call on me the following morning to return thanks in person.

"Then we sat down to the table. I was so happy and so merry! The greatest happiness consists in making others happy, and that joy was mine. And as Bertha cleared the table she related again and again, to my great satisfaction, how overcome with joy the director had seemed.

"Another hour passed—it must have been close upon nine—when the door opened, and my friend Ibsen entered, with a cage in his hand.

"'Why, Ibsen, what makes you call so late?' I asked astonished.

"'Well,' said he, after he had greeted my wife, 'the fact is, I am sorry to disturb you, but the dealer from whom I bought the parrot this morning has just sent me a similar second one, and I am so glad to be able to give you a little pleasant surprise that I brought it myself.'

"Deeply moved, I gave him my hand. 'You are really very kind,' I said. 'How have I merited such attention?'

"'Oh, don't mention it,' he said. 'But let us put both parrots in the same cage. I am curious to see how they will behave.'

"'So am I,' I answered, and then, embarrassed, added: 'Do you know, I have had a curious experience with the first parrot you sent me.'

"'Why, how so?' asked Ibsen astonished.

"'Well, I had to make some present to our director, and I thought you wouldn't take it amiss, so I sent him the parrot.'

"Ibsen was astonished. 'What a contemptible thing to do!'

"'How contemptible?'

"'Why,' he replied, in turn embarrassed, 'I myself received the first parrot from the director, and I sent it to you because I thought you would like it.'

"'And the second?' I asked eagerly.

"'Why, I got that from the director, too. But what's amiss with you?'

"I sank down, quite overcome. The poor parrot—twice had I received it as a present, had twice given it away, and now for the third time it was there before me in all its glory. But there was one good thing about the whole affair. In being sent about it had caught cold, and in less than a week it was dead. I am sorry now, because I could have given it to you. I think I have one of its wings left, which would do to put into a hat."

H. Gruder.

Three Big Surprises.

There are at the present moment three very great attractions which are drawing public attention to *Pearson's Weekly*.

The first of these is:

An offer of a situation on the staff of the paper at a salary of £200 a year, given to the lucky young man whom the editor considers is the most suitable of those who enter for a very simple examination. Full particulars will be found in the current number of *Pearson's Weekly*, and the last day for sending in is Monday, January 31st, so that there is little time to lose.

Surprise No. 2 is:

A magnificent new serial story written by Mr. Louis Tracy, and entitled "The Lost Provinces." It deals with a furious war between France and Germany, the Germans being led by the Emperor, William II., and the French by Jerome K. Vansittart, the American millionaire who posed as hero in Mr. Tracy's well-known story "An American Emperor." Each instalment is crammed with incident, and is written in a bright and crisp style.

Surprise No. 3 is:

An offer of £1,000, £100, and £25 every week in connection with a simple football competition. Even if you yourself know nothing about football, you stand a very good chance of winning one of these prizes by getting the advice of one who does know.

These are the three chief attractions at present in *P.W.* There are many more too numerous to mention, but you will find out all about them by getting a copy of the current issue.

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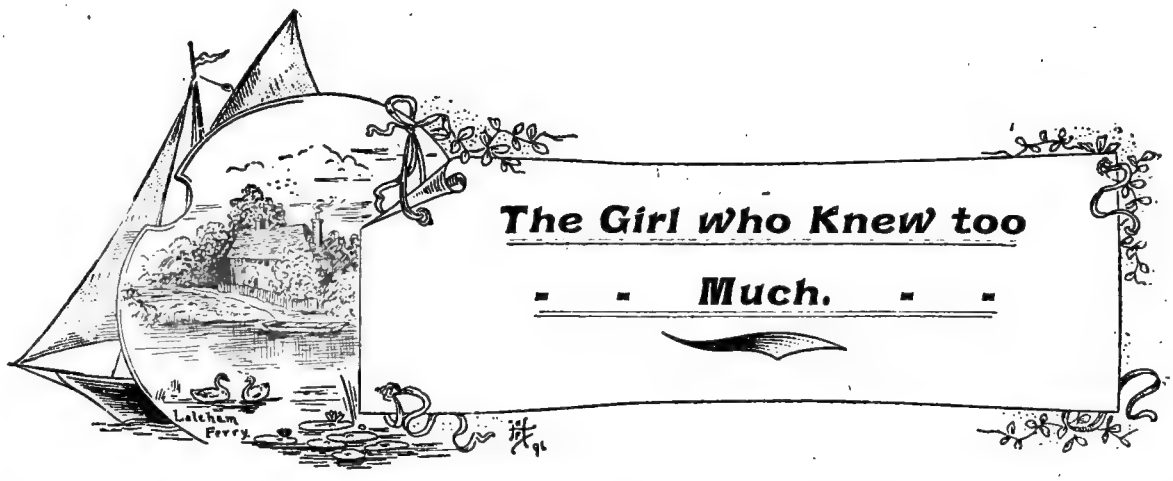

The Girl Who Knew too Much.

CURTIS KENT, a young man who had inherited a fortune, and had doubled it in business, was opening his letters one morning when he was surprised to find the following:

Ann Street Bank,
London, October 18th, 189—.

DEAR SIR,—This bank holds, under protest, a bill drawn by Wilbur S. Fletcher, July 17th, 189—, at three months, for £780, payable at the Ann Street Bank, and protested for non-payment October 17th. It was accepted by you and the proceeds placed to credit of Wilbur S. Fletcher by whom the amount has been drawn. Please give this matter your early attention. See inclosed formal notice.—Yours truly,

MORRIS HOLWORTH, Manager.

The inclosure was the usual notice of protest. Mr. Kent gave the matter his "early attention."

He required no special urging, but went at once to the Ann Street Bank, which was not very far from his office. Mr. Holworth did not make Mr. Kent wait. The bank official knew the merchant by reputation, though they had never met before.

"I received a notice from you this morning," said Mr. Kent, "in reference to a bill drawn by a man named Fletcher and purporting to be accepted by me."

The manager's brow was furrowed by lines of anxiety the instant that his ear caught the word "purporting."

"Is there anything wrong with it?" he asked.

"I never heard of Wilbur S. Fletcher," he said. "I never saw the bill before."

"Do you mean that your signature is a forgery?" exclaimed Holworth.

"Certainly. It is not even a good forgery. The resemblance to my signature is so slight that it would not deceive anybody."

"This is extraordinary," said Holworth. "I remember this transaction very distinctly, and I understood that you called here with reference to it."

"I never called here for any purpose before," said Kent promptly.

The manager opened a door which led into another office and called to Mr. Newcombe, the assistant manager of the bank.

"You remember that Fletcher note indorsed by Curtis Kent?" said Holworth. "Didn't you tell me that Mr. Kent called upon you about it?"

"Yes," said the under official, entering the room. "He came to see me, and explained why he was accepting the paper. Is anything the matter with it?"

"This is Mr. Kent, and——"

"What!" cried Newcombe. "This is not the man who called on me!"

Here was a fraud, open and palpable. That the present Mr. Kent was the real one could not be doubted, and if the other had been bogus, the bank had been robbed.

The first thing to do was to get to the accurate history of the case. This, as explained to Mr. Kent, was as follows:

A handsome young man, giving his name as Wilbur S. Fletcher, had called on Mr. Holworth at the bank in July. He said that he was going to buy a share in a business, at that time being conducted by John Spaulding, whose office was in a big building in Marsden Street. Mr. Spaulding was engaged in the manufacture and sale of a patented portable heating apparatus for offices.

Mr. Fletcher admitted that he had neither money nor credit, but he had a good friend who possessed both. That friend was Curtis Kent.

"He had agreed to accept a bill for me," said Fletcher, "in order that I may get the money to buy a share in that business. Indeed, he offered to lend me the money, but I preferred to do it in this way. I have made an arrangement with Mr. Spaulding that he will transfer the account of the business to your bank when I become his partner. This is the only inducement I can offer you to take the bill."

Mr. Holworth said he would consider the matter. In the first place, he had a representative of a commercial agency "look up" Mr. Kent. The report was all that could be desired.

Fletcher called again, and was asked how much of an account Mr. Spaulding would carry. He admitted that it would be small at first—about five hundred pounds to begin with—but he called attention to the fact that the balance of such a business would naturally be small in summer. In the winter it should run up to four or five times that amount.

On the same day the bogus Mr. Kent called, and he had such a satisfactory story to tell that the bank decided to take the bill.

Mr. Fletcher drew it in Holworth's presence, and the manager gave it to the messenger, who took it to Mr. Kent's office, where it was accepted.

When the story had reached this point Mr. Kent was naturally deeply interested. He could not see how the note could have been sent to his office without betraying the whole game.

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"I'd like to see the messenger that you sent over there," he said.

The messenger was summoned. He was a man over fifty years old, but as erect and active as a youth. There was something of the soldier in his bearing; it clung to him despite the thirty years that had passed since he had served his country in the field.

A more honest face than John O'Neil's would have been hard to find. Upon being questioned, he remembered perfectly the affair of the note. But the surprising thing was that he recognised Mr. Kent.

"I took the bill to the office of Kent and Co., as directed," he said. "This gentleman was at his desk. I could see him from where I stood, outside a little window, where a boy sat to take visitors' names.

"'Are you from the Ann Street Bank?' says he.

"'I am,' says I.

"'Then give me the bill, and I'll take it to Mr. Kent,' says he.

"I wouldn't have done it, if I had not been where I could see the gentleman himself, but as it was, I did. The boy took the note, and gave it to a young woman, who took it to Mr. Kent, and he endorsed it."

"How did you know he was Mr. Kent?" asked Holworth. "Did you depend on what you were told?"

"No, sir; I had seen the gentleman before."

"This seems to be an elaborate conspiracy," said Holworth to Kent. "We have found five people in it already. There are Fletcher and Spaulding, and the man who represented himself to be you. Then the boy and the woman in your office must have been in it; so that makes five."

"Then you saw Spaulding?"

"Certainly. He transferred his account as agreed."

"What does it amount to now?" asked Kent.

The account was looked up, with the result that Mr. Spaulding was found to have a balance of five pounds odd.

"Of course he has skipped before this," said the manager. "His account ran down to a hundred pounds very soon after we took it, and about a week ago he drew it down to where it is now."

"It would be worth while to send a man down to the place where his office was," said the manager. "Come to think of it, I can look in there. It's close to the Central Trust Company's offices, where I must be at twelve o'clock."

"I've got curiosity enough to go with you," said Kent, "if you're going now. It strikes me that this is a very neat game, and I'd like a little more light on it."

It was agreed that the bank should report the case to the police at once. Kent was asked whether the boy and the young woman mentioned by O'Neil were still in his employ. When the messenger had described them, Kent said that both had left him. As nearly as he could remember, they gave up their position about the time of the bill transaction. He had no idea where they could be found. Holworth and Kent went to the address of John Spaulding. They had little expectation of finding any clue to his whereabouts, and they were therefore greatly surprised to find that he occupied a fine suite of rooms, and was surrounded by every evidence of prosperity.

But the biggest surprise came when they were shown into the presence of Mr. Spaulding. He did not resemble the man who had given that name at the Ann Street Bank; he had never had an account there; he had sold no interest in his business; and he had never heard of Wilbur Fletcher.

The swindlers had merely used Spaulding's name, trusting to luck that he would not hear of it in time to interfere with their plans.

"How do we know that your messenger ever went to my office? He may have committed the forgery himself," said Kent suspiciously.

"I'm not given to over-confidence in others," rejoined Holworth, "but I'll require considerable evidence before I believe in O'Neil's guilt. He has been with us for years, and his record is A1."

Kent was thinking about the young woman who had figured so disagreeably in O'Neil's story. He remembered her as a really beautiful girl, in whom he had taken a deep interest. He had been very sorry when she announced that she must leave his employ and added that she was about to be married.

He reflected that she was likely to get into trouble over the affair, and the longer he thought of it the less he liked the idea. The result was that he called upon Harrison Keith, the detective, that evening, and asked him to look up the case.

"I'm sure the girl is honest," he said, "and I want you to see that she escapes annoyance. If the bank people get after her, you block them."

At the outset, there seemed little need for Keith to stand between the regular police and Miss Bertha Warren—the name by which Mr. Kent had known the young woman in question. The police failed to find her. Even Keith was baffled for a time.

The boy mentioned by O'Neil was easily found, his name was Ben Chase. His story agreed with O'Neil's as far as possible.

Chase said that on the morning of July 17th, Miss Warren told him that a man from the Ann Street Bank might call with a note. If so, Chase was to give it to her, and she was to carry it to Mr. Kent. The boy had done just as she had told him to do, and that was all he knew about it.

In tracing Fletcher, Keith made better progress than in pursuing the girl. He soon struck a clue.

Keith did not feel much interest in the affair at first, but as the case developed it began to interest him, and one of its most entertaining features was the clue to the identity of Fletcher which has been already referred to.

The very accurate description furnished by Holworth suggested to Keith's memory a mean scamp—with names enough to fill a directory—who had made his living in the attractive field known as boarding-house sneak thieving.

He was one of those fellows who call to look at rooms and clear off the hat-rack while the servant is calling her mistress. Sometimes such a thief will examine the rooms, and put small objects into his pocket while he is doing so, or he will even engage a room, in order to prey for a day or two upon other lodgers.

From such an occupation to "doing" a bank, is a step so long that scarcely anybody ever takes it. Keith was greatly interested to know what had developed Fletcher's genius so rapidly.

He had previously been distinguished only for his good looks. His picture was in the Rogues' Gallery, and it was a long way the handsomest in the collection.

Keith found that Fletcher was in Liverpool, and soon tracked him to the house where he was living.

He found that the local man who had been watching the house for him had reason to suspect that he was visited in this house by a young woman. He described her as being very handsome, always dressed in black.

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He soon succeeded in discovering the girl and getting a look at her; and he had no doubt that she was the missing Bertha Warren.

The detective telegraphed the facts to Kent in London, and he replied that he would start for Liverpool at once. Evidently he was deeply interested in his pretty ex-employée.

Pending Kent's arrival, Keith did nothing but keep Fletcher and Miss Warren under surveillance. Both remained very quiet, though once, for a few hours, Miss Warren got away from an expert "shadow," who had been lent to Keith for a time by the Liverpool Chief of Police.

There was considerable doubt whether she had done it intentionally or accidentally. The shadow inclined to the latter view. He reported that the girl seemed to be unconscious of his presence, and that her conduct, as a whole, was not that of a criminal.

When Kent arrived, he insisted upon calling upon the girl at once. She was known in her lodging as Mrs. Quesada.

Keith let Kent do as he wished. It was the best thing to do, so far as the girl's interests were concerned, and it must not be forgotten that Keith had primarily been retained to act in her behalf.

Bertha Warren had never looked more beautiful than on the day when Kent was ushered into the apartment where she awaited him. The man's heart beat tumultuously as he looked at her.

"How does it happen that you are here?" she cried. "Is it possible that you got my letter so soon?"

"I have received no letter from you," he said.

"Then why are you here?"

He told her frankly. She shed many tears as she listened to his words.

"Had you received my letter," she said, at last, "you would now know the secret of this shameful affair. I confessed it all in writing. Certainly I should have no hesitancy in telling you the truth as we stand face to face, though it is a dreadful thing to tell."

"I am a criminal, Mr. Kent, and I ask no mercy—at least, not for myself. For my mother——"

Her voice broke. She sank into a chair and buried her face in her hands.

The sounds of her sobs penetrated to the adjoining room. The door between the two apartments opened, and a stately woman, grey-haired, but still beautiful, entered and bowed to Kent.

"I am her mother," she said, in a voice that would have melted a heart of stone.

She walked to the girl's side and stroked Bertha's pretty brown hair lovingly.

"She has been led into evil, poor child," continued Mrs. Warren. "Now she will make amends so far as she is able by telling the whole truth. Speak, Bertha."

Bertha, after a great struggle, raised her head.

"It was love," she said, "and I was bitterly deceived. But, thank Heaven! I learnt the truth in time to save myself from the disgrace of being his wife."

"Whose wife?" cried Kent. "Fletcher's?"

"That was the name he used in the wicked transaction I was made to assist in bringing to success," said the girl. "I had met him at the house of an acquaintance in London. I loved him the instant that my eyes rested on him. He is so handsome."

Kent winced.

"I did not then read his heart," Bertha continued. "He is deep. His villainy is not upon the surface. He seemed to be equally attracted by me. We met every day. Within a week he had told me of his love, and I replied not unkindly. He asked me to marry him, but at the same time told me that we must wait. He was poor. Thus we came to talk of his affairs. He said that bad luck had pursued him, and had reduced him to the last possibility of desperation. He was then a clerk upon starvation wages—half of what you were good enough to pay so worthless a worker as I am.

"He had been obliged to pawn most of the fine clothes which he had bought in more prosperous times, to meet the necessities of life. But he was full of hope. He said that a great business opportunity had presented itself. If he could find some one who would lend him a few hundred pounds he could buy a share of a splendid business that would make him rich, and enable us to be united very soon.

"There were wealthy friends, he said, to whom he would apply for the loan of the money he needed. In the succeeding days he grew more and more gloomy. All his friends were turning their backs upon him.

"What he desired was to secure the acceptance of a bill by some rich man. He kept repeating to me that it did not involve the loan of a penny from the acceptor. A bank would lend the money, and he could easily pay the bill when it came due by making another bill for another bank, and pledging his stock in the business as security. It would be worth, he said, far more than he should have to pay for it.

"He spoke of you and said that it would be easy enough to discount a bill with your acceptance. It would cost you nothing. Then, as if in gloomy jest, he suggested the plan by which your credit could be used without your knowing it.

"Jest became earnest. I—oh, how wicked I am—I agreed to do the deed. You must know by this time how it is done. I knew—for he told me—that on a certain day the messenger with the bill would be sent from the bank. I told Ben, the boy who sat by the window, to hand the bill to me.

"Then, when it came, I substituted a messenger boy's ticket for it. You signed that, and at the same moment I put your name on the bill, writing on top of your desk tactically before your very eyes. How could I have done such a thing?"

"You were wholly under that man's evil influence, my dear," said the mother gently. "The sin will be forgiven you."

"It will by me," said Kent promptly. "I will never say anything about it."

"But the bank?" said Mrs. Warren. "It has been robbed, and will not forgive. No, my daughter must suffer the penalty, but——"

She could not go on. Her voice failed her. Then, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, she fell upon her knees and begged Kent to save her daughter.

The tears were trickling down Kent's cheeks. He looked at the girl and he looked at her grey-haired mother, and the longer he gazed the smaller became the sum of £780 in comparison with the demands for mercy.

"Don't cry, either of you," he said. "I understand"—he turned to Bertha—"that you escaped unscathed from that villain's clutches?"

The girl looked him full in the face.

"I learnt his guilt before my hand was given to him," she said. "I need say no more to you, who know me."

"It's all right," cried Kent. "Don't you worry a bit. I'll get you out of this scrape all right."

"Impossible!" sobbed Bertha. "I am a forger."

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"Who says you are?" rejoined Kent. "I'd like to see anybody prove it."

"I have confessed."

"You have confessed to me only. As to the signature, it's genuine. There's no forgery about it. A man can authorise anybody to sign his name for him. Very well, you have my authority to do that, and I am going back to London to pay it!"

When the full significance of this statement was made clear to Mrs. Warren, she swooned for joy. Bertha and Kent had hard work in restoring her to consciousness.

Then she and her daughter joined in protesting that Kent's generosity was too great. But his purpose was not to be shaken.

The girl hid her face in her hands, and called herself unworthy.

"We'll see about that later," said Kent. "The only trouble now will be that my action in accepting the signature will probably clear that rascal Fletcher. I suppose he might be prosecuted for getting money under false pretences, even if the signature was genuine, but that would make trouble and bring your name into the proceedings.

"So perhaps the best way is to let him go. He'll wind up in jail anyway; we needn't be in any great hurry to send him."

So the matter was arranged, Bertha was to take her mother to the home of some relatives in a village near Liverpool. Then the girl was to return to London, and re-enter Kent's employ. The police were to be withdrawn from the case after as much money as possible had been scared out of Fletcher.

Bertha, on learning the truth, had tried to frighten Fletcher into meeting the bill, and had followed him to Liverpool for that purpose, finally writing to Kent.

When Kent had heard all this from her lips, he reluctantly left her, and joined Harrison Keith at the place agreed upon. The detective was directed to remove the watch from Miss Warren, but to keep Fletcher in sight for a few days.

Keith approved of Kent's plan of calling upon the criminal, and offered to arrange the best time for it. On the evening of the day following that on which Bertha had made her confession, Keith notified Kent that the time was ripe for seeing Fletcher. They accordingly went to the criminal's home.

Keith, in disguise, had engaged the room next Fletcher's, and had arranged a means of hearing what was said in the crook's retreat.

"He's been pretty quiet," said Keith, when Kent joined him in the room he had engaged. "He's had few visitors, and he hasn't been out of the house once. There's somebody in there with him now, so you'll have to wait. Meanwhile, you can overhear their conversation."

So saying, Keith opened the door of a closet. Instantly the sound of voices in Fletcher's room became plainly audible.

"You miserable whelp!" a hard-voiced woman was saying, "what would become of you if I didn't look out for you? I picked you up a hall thief, and I've made something worth while out of you. The least you can do in return is to obey my orders. Why did you leave this house after I expressly ordered you not to do it?"

"See here, Bertha," replied Fletcher, in a cringing tone. "you're stepping on me a little too hard, ain't you? What have I got out of this, anyhow? You swiped all the swag we got out of the bill deal. I haven't seen a ha'penny of it except my expenses. And now you put me in this cheap hole and let me half starve."

"Shut up!" cried Bertha Warren, the late tearful penitent. "I give you all that you deserve. If you behave yourself, you'll be in clover when I've married that very easy mark, Kent."

"Married him! Why, you're married to me!"

"Yes, and to a better man than either of you besides. But that doesn't count. Another won't hurt me. He won't be a long job; he's too soft. I'll have his dough in about a year at the outside."

"What am I to do meanwhile?"

"Lie low, and get along on what I can spare," she said, with a laugh. "Now mind what I tell you. I've played this game well, so far. Suppose I'd taken your advice; where would we have been? No, sir; I'm the only thief that ever got the best of Harrison Keith, and did it in the only possible way—by throwing up both hands the instant I learnt that he was on the case. Otherwise, he'd have had us both in the jug. My letter to that fool Kent was a masterpiece. I'm only sorry he missed getting it; but Keith was a little too quick for me. And as for my mother——"

Bertha laughed softly, but with evident great enjoyment.

Kent thrust both hands into his hair, and staggered out of the apartment.

"Oh, Keith, Keith!" he cried; "for the love of Heaven, don't let this get out on me! Oh—h—h!"

It was a combined groan and shudder.

"I might have married her!" he continued. "Yes, I might, by the eternal hills! And she has how many husbands already? Was it a dozen? And that mother of hers! She——"

"Is no relation whatever," said Keith. "She is Celia Delafield, a supposed actress, engaged for the occasion. In reality she is about twenty-nine years old. The grey hair was a wig. I'll admit she played well—better, I'll be bound, than she ever could on the boards.

"Yes, you were neatly fooled, Mr. Kent, but it will come out all right. We'll put both those creatures behind the bars. And there's a third, too—a supposed actor named Gallatin, who, I strongly suspect, personated both you and Spaulding in this little comedy. I think he is also that husband better than either you or Fletcher, to whom the young lady referred."

"Don't! don't!" groaned Kent. "I—I'm going back to London. I suppose you'll act for the regular department in the remainder of the case. Send your bill to date to me, and if it's under five thousand, I'll pay it at once. I'd have married her!"

He shivered as if he had been stabbed with an icicle. Then, with a wave of his hand to Keith, he hurried from the room, from the house, and from the city.

J. H. P.

A BURGLARY CLAIM PAID.

ANOTHER reader of *Pearson's Weekly*, who was wise enough to comply with the conditions made in the insurance coupon in that paper, has just been paid a sum of money to cover the loss he sustained through his house being entered by thieves.

This is the 105th payment of the kind made by *P.W.*

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By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

Author of "Valdar the Oft-Born," "Briton or Boer?" "The Outlaws of the Air," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Madame Sybil.

"Well, General, how is your patient? Any quieter than he was?"

"I thing he is so quiet, Don Francisco, that he will remain so for a very long time. Most of us are a long time dead, eh? Would you like to come and see him? It would be more satisfactory to you, and, you know, in a place like this, the sooner you have the funeral the better. Come, I will show you."

"Very well," said Lorrain. "Perhaps it would be as well. Just wait till I've got a fresh cigar going. I don't suppose the air of those apartments of yours downstairs would strike one as particularly fresh after the breezes of the Carribean Sea. Did he take it quietly?" he went on as the General led the way towards the lower regions of the citadel.

"Quietly? Yes, and like a gentleman until just towards the end," he said, pointing to the sundry strips of plaster with which his face was adorned. "And then just at the last, even after he had drunk the sedative, he so far forgot his manners as to fling his glass in my face, and he cut me grievously, as you see. *Carrajo!* I could have killed him for it, but then, of course, there was no need."

"N—o, of course, there wouldn't be," laughed Lorrain, "but still, I dare say you got just as much satisfaction out of watching him die, and it would be less trouble, too, wouldn't it? Phew, what a beastly hole! It isn't fit to put a dog into!"

"Unless the dog walked on two legs and was an enemy, señor. That would be another matter, wouldn't it?" replied the General, with a soft, fat sort of laugh, as the sentry whom he had summoned to attend them unlocked the door of the cell and threw it open. "See, there he is. Go and see for yourself. I think you will find him quiet enough."

So far the conversation had, of course, been carried on in Spanish, but as Lorrain went to the side of the stone bench on which lay the lifeless body of the man who a few hours ago had been her ladyship's husband, he forgot his habitual caution for an instant and muttered as he lifted one of the half-closed eyelids:

"Yes, he is dead enough, but I wonder if he said anything before he died."

Don Gregorio's quick ears caught the words, and as Lorrain's back was turned to him, he indulged in a fleeting smile, but there was not a sign of intelligence upon his face when Lorrain looked round a moment after and said in Spanish:

"He seems dead enough for all practical purposes. That must be wonderful stuff of yours. Could you give me some of it?"

"It might be possible!" replied Don Gregorio, with a secondary meaning which Lorrain was a long way from suspecting. "It is, as you say, useful. If you have that, you ask your best enemy in a friendly sort of way to have a cocktail with you. He says 'yes.' You mix the cocktail, and, if you don't make a mistake in the glasses, it is done. Of course, if you do, well, there, no one but a fool would do that. So, Don Francisco, are you satisfied that your requests have been complied with?"

"Yes, General, I think that will do," replied Lorrain, who meanwhile had been carefully seeking for any signs of vitality in the heart or pulse which had ceased their beating for ever. "The funeral can take place as soon as you like, and the quicker and quieter it is the better."

"It shall take place at once, Don Francisco, and then there can be no mistake," said the General, turning to the sentry. "José, put down your keys and take the chain off the Señor Inglese's body. Meanwhile, Don Francisco, if you will help me with your strength, I will show you that those old Spaniards who built this place provided for all emergencies."

As he said this he kicked away some rotten matting which half covered the floor of the cell, and under it Lorrain saw a big, oblong slab of stone with an iron ring-bolt in one end. Don Gregorio took the rifle which the sentry had laid aside, put it through the ring, and asked Lorrain to stand on the other side and take hold of the barrel end.

"Now lift!" he said, taking the butt in his own hand.

Lorrain obeyed, and after a tug or two the stone came up, revolving on a middle axis, which creaked as if the trap had not been used very recently. Underneath there was a black hole, out of which came an unpleasant sound of soughing, sluggish waters.

"Handy, but filthily disagreeable," said Lorrain, "even for the disposal of one's enemies. Still, I suppose it is as good a grave for a dead man as any other."

"Certainly," said Don Gregorio, "since the dead are not fastidious. But in the old times they used to use it for living enemies as well. You see how far we have progressed in civilisation since then, señor! Now, José, bring the Señor Inglese here and let us see the last of him."

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The sentry, who had meanwhile knocked out the bolt which held the iron band round the waist of Sir Langton's body, took hold of the ankles and dragged it off the stone bench. Lorrain's finer sensibilities received a shock as the lifeless head struck the stone floor with a most disagreeable sound. The negro dragged the body to the edge of the hole, and stooped down to throw it in. As he did so Don Gregorio shifted his right hand from the rifle stock to his hip pocket, pulled out a revolver, and sent a bullet through the sentry's brain. His body lurched forward and disappeared down the hole. Lorrain heard the two quickly succeeding splashes in the water below, and then Don Gregorio, lowering his end of the rifle, said:

"Thank you, señor, that will do. We can put the stone down now. It is as well not to have too many independent witnesses of a little transaction of this sort. You and I are now the only people alive who know what happened to the unfortunate Señor Inglese who had the misfortune to become unnecessary to my best of friends. Now, if you please, we will go to the palace and drink a bottle to the repose of the Señor Inglese's soul. I wish also to give you the pleasure of knowing my wife. I sent her to my hacienda in the country when the trouble began, and she has returned to-day."

"Your what, General?" said Lorrain, with a laugh whose mirthlessness was possibly the result of what he had just seen. "Your wife! Without offence may I ask which? Have I seen her before?"

"No, I think you have not," said Don Gregorio without any sign of resentment at the very obvious insinuation.

He took up the lamp and lighted Lorrain out of the cell, carrying the sentry's rifle in the other hand. The door clanged to behind them. They went along the passage and up the filthy, half-rotten stairs which led to the ground floor, and when they reached it Don Gregorio leant the rifle against the wall and whispered:

"To-morrow I shall send for José, and hear that he has deserted. It is as well that there is no one about. It will make the matter easier, though, of course, he was only a nigger."

"And you're only the sort of unspeakable scoundrel that it takes a drop of black and a few more drops of white blood to make," thought Lorrain, as he followed him out of the citadel and across the plaza to the flat-roofed building of stuccoed mud, which was called the palace. A couple of sentries presented arms as they went in through the gates which led to the central court round which the palace was built. Don Gregorio led the way in a half deferential fashion to a garishly furnished drawing-room on the first floor, and said, motioning Lorrain to a sofa upholstered in flaring crimson velvet:

"Do me the honour to sit, Don Francisco. The señora, of whom I spoke down yonder, is, as I may say, my last wife, and, I may say too, that she is the most beautiful of them all. I have not told you of her on our way here, because I prefer that when you see her your eyes shall speak for me. I will only tell you now that she is an Inglesa, and I hope that when you see her your heart will still remain true to the señora of the late unfortunate, who was unhappy enough to marry her before you saw her. With your permission I will go and bring her."

"Pray do so, my dear General," said Lorrain, thankful for the chance of getting for even a few minutes out of his sight. "Pray do so. I can assure you that, after what you have said, I am all expectation to see la Señora Presidenta, and if you could send up some wine meanwhile I should be glad of it, for I haven't got the taste of that atmosphere down yonder out of my mouth yet."

"Assuredly," said Don Gregorio. "The wine shall come first and then the señora, but I know which you will find brightest and most sparkling."

As he left the room Don Francisco thrust his hands deep down into his trousers pockets and leant back on the sofa, staring up at the gaudily painted ceiling.

"Now," he said to himself in a low, musing half whisper, "I wonder what that greedy little scoundrel knows about this business. It didn't strike me that the little blackguard could speak English when I handed Pendril over to him. But, still, I don't suppose they would have any sort of conversation. Anyhow, even if Pendril had been able to do it the Magnet would be the last thing that he would talk about, surely. If Gregorio had suspected anything he might have tried torture, but he didn't, and I didn't see any marks on Pendril's body, so I suppose that's all right. Still, it was the sort of mistake that I mustn't make again."

He had got so far when a nigger lackey in what had once been a gorgeous livery brought in a big silver salver with glasses. He was followed by another with a couple of bottles of champagne in ice-buckets.

"You can put them down," he said to the first one in Spanish. "His Excellency will be back soon, and then we'll have them opened."

"By-the-way," he went on to himself in English, "I wonder what sort of a person the Señora is? An Englishwoman, too! What a fate! I wonder where he found her."

At this moment the door at the other end of the drawing-room opened.

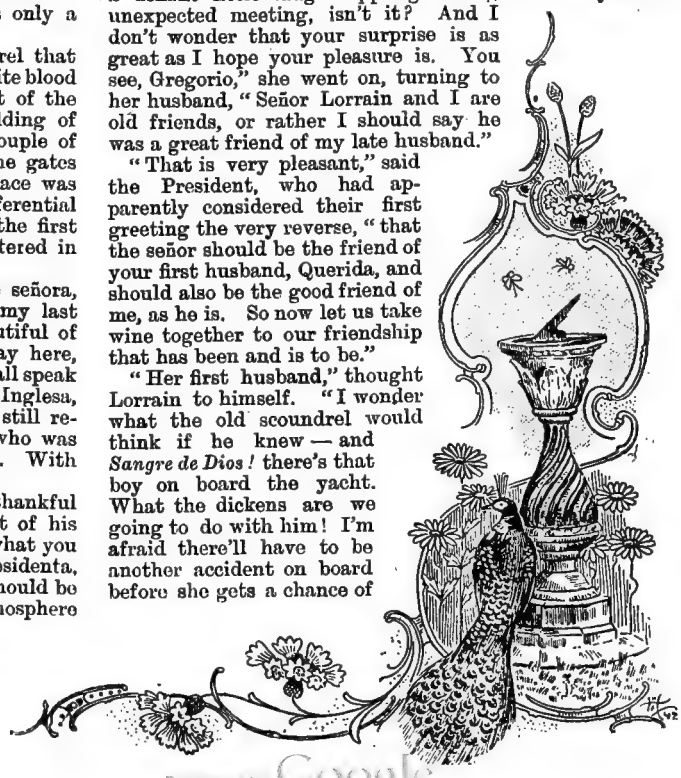
"Good-evening, Señor Lorrain. Welcome to the palace to which your most opportune arrival has restored us. I had no idea that our old friendship would be re-commenced under such pleasant circumstances."

"Good Heavens, Sybil! You!" Lorrain almost shouted, as he sprang to his feet and stood staring, utterly off his guard for the moment, at the queenly and splendidly-dressed figure that was advancing with hands outstretched down the room towards him.

"Yes, it is I!" she said, looking him straight in the eyes, and speaking in a voice that had just the suspicion of a defiant little laugh rippling through it. "Quite an unexpected meeting, isn't it? And I don't wonder that your surprise is as great as I hope your pleasure is. You see, Gregorio," she went on, turning to her husband, "Señor Lorrain and I are old friends, or rather I should say he was a great friend of my late husband."

"That is very pleasant," said the President, who had apparently considered their first greeting the very reverse, "that the señor should be the friend of your first husband, Querida, and should also be the good friend of me, as he is. So now let us take wine together to our friendship that has been and is to be."

"Her first husband," thought Lorrain to himself. "I wonder what the old scoundrel would think if he knew — and *Sangre de Dios!* there's that boy on board the yacht. What the dickens are we going to do with him! I'm afraid there'll have to be another accident on board before she gets a chance of



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seeing him. What in the name of all that is infernal and inconvenient brought the woman here just at this moment! Well, *Señor y señora,*" he went on aloud, taking a glass of champagne from the President, "it is a pleasant meeting that brings old friends together. I drink to your healths, and to the honour and happiness of your union."

There was an almost imperceptible stress on the "honour" which brought the blood for the moment to Sybil Pendril's cheeks, but it passed unnoticed by Don Gregorio, and Lorrain's toast was drunk with the most friendly cordiality. In the conversation which followed Lorrain easily perceived a carefully veiled, but nevertheless eager desire on the part of both of them to get a clearer idea of his plans and purposes than he had the slightest intention of giving them, and when, after refusing a most pressing invitation to spend the night at the palace, he rose to take his leave, all they had got from him was the information which he had vouchsafed early in the conversation, that he intended the next day, or the day after, to undertake a sort of half picnic, half exploring trip up to the head waters of the Ozama, a sort of prospecting party in fact, which would make, at any rate, an attempt to locate the treasure-chest of Don Christoval, and when he got back on board the *Minnehaha*, at about eleven, he found her ladyship walking up and down the poop with short, unequal strides that betokened anything but a peaceful frame of mind.

"Well," she said, stopping short as he came to meet her; "is it—is he—is my husband safe and well?"

"Safe? Yes, Jessica *mia*," he replied, taking her hands and then, unresisted, slipping one arm round her waist and stooping down and kissing her. "The fact is, Querida," he went on in the soft, caressing tone that had now become so familiar to her, "he is so safe that you may henceforth dismiss him completely from a heart that he was never worthy to occupy. There is no need to go into details. Let it suffice that you are free, free to give your sweet self to one who loves you with a love that he, poor creature, never dreamt of. You can say that your life begins from now. So far you have only existed. Now you shall live. Come, let us go below. I have something surprising and of the greatest importance to tell you."

Her ladyship shivered in his arms, but she said nothing. Whatever had been done was done, and she recognised that however hideous the crime might be, it was not only inevitable, but, moreover, that she, by deliberately anticipating it, had taken to herself a very distinct share of the guilt.

When they reached the state-room he took her by the hands again and said:

"Jessica, who do you think Don Gregorio introduced me to at the palace to-night as—well, his wife he called her?"

"I have no idea. Who was it?"

"None other than Sybil Viney that was," he said. "Sybil Pendril that was later still, and mother of the present Sir Arthur Pendril, who, in the ordinary course of things, would now succeed to the baronetcy and the estates, provided always that no accidents happen to him before his mother or any other officious friend of the family is able to put forward his claims and prove them."

"And when is the accident to happen, Francisco?" she said, looking up at him with the glint of an evil light in her pretty eyes and a hard ring in her voice that was not there the last time she spoke.

"I am glad to see that your ladyship's spirit rises to the occasion," he said. "You will be a fitting life companion for one who has never yet allowed an obstacle to bar the pathway of his life purposes, and I can assure you that the accident will be arranged for with the least possible delay."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A Trip to Sea.

When her ladyship awoke the next morning she was surprised to find by the vibration that the yacht's propellers were working at very considerable velocity, and that the yacht herself was evidently going very fast through the water. She got up and dressed as quickly as possible and went up on deck to learn the reason of this unexpected departure from their original plans. She looked about her and saw to her astonishment that the *Minnehaha* was almost out of sight of land, and that the high coast of Hayti only looked like a low brown line on the horizon. The yacht's bow, however, was pointed towards it, and a glance at the water swirling past her sides in long, smooth green swathes and tumbling away behind her in a wide wake of foam, told her that, wherever the *Minnehaha* had been, and whatever her errand, she was making the best of her speed back to the place she had come from.

Lorrain was on the bridge with Captain Peters, apparently in close conversation with him, but when he looked up and saw her on deck, he came down to meet her, and as they shook hands he said:

"Good-morning, your ladyship. Change of air seems to have tempted you out pretty early."

"Change of air!" she echoed. "Yes, it is indeed a change. Have we been all night at sea, and may I ask the reason for the change? You didn't tell me anything about it last night."

"No," he said with one of those smiles of his which she had got accustomed to find at once so pleasant and unpleasant. "And yet in a way I did. The fact is there were one or two reasons. In the first place, you knew the harbour of Santo Domingo is very unhealthy, and as we have to take a trip into the interior shortly, I thought a change of air wouldn't be at all a bad thing. Secondly, I regret to tell you that late last night, or, rather, early this morning, we had a death on board."

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"What—not——"

"Y—e—s," he said quite seriously, "I fear your suspicions are correct. The sometime heir of Pendril Abbey died at two o'clock this morning. We will say of malaria and dysentry, which, unfortunately, is not by any means an uncommon combination in these islands, and especially in the old Spanish towns. As it was necessary for sanitary and other reasons to dispose of the remains, as the undertakers say, as speedily as possible, I thought it would be best to run fifty or sixty miles out to sea and get the matter finished before anyone had any time to make inconvenient inquiries. The funeral took place about ten minutes before your ladyship came on deck. By the way, I can call you 'your ladyship' now without the slightest reservation.

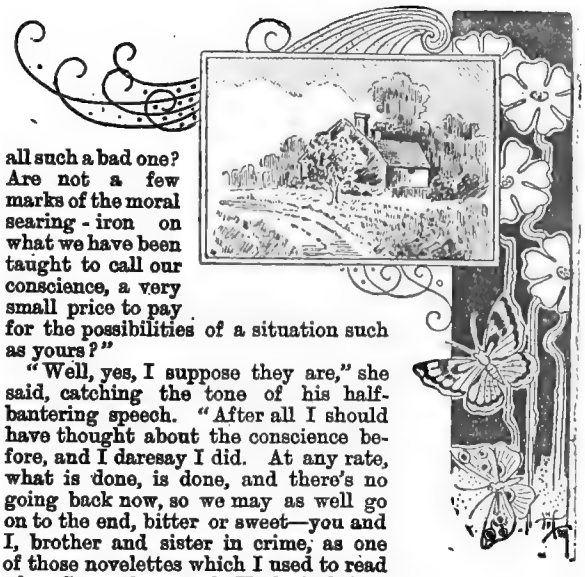
"Well, yes, I can quite understand your looking at me in that half reproachful sort of way," he went on as Jessie stopped suddenly in their walk, and looked up at him with something in her eyes, half fear and half horror. "And, I daresay, I deserve it; but then, you see, I thought you would like to be relieved of the unpleasant necessity of thinking and acting in these delicate matters, and of course I couldn't ignore the fact that it would be extremely awkward for you and all of us if Sybil Pendril had come on board the yacht this morning and found her son alive and well.

"She's a bad woman, a very bad woman, in fact; but she is, or rather was, this boy's mother, and very bad women are sometimes very good mothers. Then, again, the unexpected appearance of Mrs. Arthur Pendril, as we may call her, brought a very serious complication into our affairs. You know it can't be very long before Mr. Leigh Tristam and his bride get out here, and if they should by any chance get into communication with Madame Sybil and tell her that the old baronet is dead—well, she would very soon arrive at the very logical conclusion that her son is the only lawful heir to the baronetcy, and that she was his natural guardian till he came of age. That, of course, would mean that she could take the boy to England, and, after proving his identity and her own, take charge of the Abbey and the Pendril estates and revenue for a period of some thirteen or fourteen years. And in that case, you see, from your ladyship's point of view, there would be the very dickens to pay."

"Don't talk like that, Francisco, please," she said in a tone that was almost pleading; "don't. Who knows but what the dickens—I mean the account for all this—may have to be paid some day? I do not—of course, I cannot—blame you for what you have done, because I know you have done it mostly for my sake and with my knowledge, and yet do you know you have made me feel at times even viler and more wicked than Sybil Viney herself, for somehow even I can't bring myself to give her the name that was my mother's.

"I am a murderess by another's hand, as she is; but there are two lives to my charge, and only one to hers, and for the rest," she said, with a pitiful little droop of the head, "I suppose we are about equals. I wish to Heaven I had never seen this horrible thing that I once said I would give my soul for; and, fancy, if it hadn't been for that chance flirtation with my master's son in the library that night I might still have been a servant girl, a lady's-maid with unsatisfied ambitions, but for all that a clear conscience, and here I am only a month or two later——"

"Yes, here you are," he said, breaking in on a soliloquy that it was becoming unpleasant for him to hear. "Here you are, a woman, young, talented, beautiful and ambitious, with the means of procuring that which will gratify every ambition that you can have, and with a man at your side, who, whatever his personal faults, and, conventionally speaking, his sins—his crimes if you like—is yet devoted heart and soul to you, and who is not without those qualities which may be of some service to you in attaining those ambitions. Come now, your ladyship, is the change after



all such a bad one? Are not a few marks of the moral searing-iron on what we have been taught to call our conscience, a very small price to pay for the possibilities of a situation such as yours?"

"Well, yes, I suppose they are," she said, catching the tone of his half-bantering speech. "After all I should have thought about the conscience before, and I daresay I did. At any rate, what is done, is done, and there's no going back now, so we may as well go on to the end, bitter or sweet—you and I, brother and sister in crime, as one of those novelettes which I used to read when I was Gwynneth Harley's lady's maid, would have called us."

"Brother and sister," he echoed, pressing the hand that she had put through his arm a little closer to his side. "For the present, yes, if your ladyship insists upon it, but, I give you fair warning, that it will not be long before I find such a relationship quite intolerable."

"Possibly," she said, looking up at him with the light of a swiftly changing mood shining in her eyes and lighting up her face with a very different expression to that which had darkened it a few moments before. "Possibly, but sufficient unto the day is the added wickedness thereof. Meanwhile, has it not struck you that all this while we have only been making a toy of the Gold Magnet, that we have not even begun yet to use it seriously? When are we going to look for Don Christoval's treasure-chest?"

"I hope that all my arrangements will be completed to-day, and that we shall be able to start by day-break to-morrow," he said, not altogether pleased by the sudden turn she had given the conversation. "We shall be back in Santo Domingo in a couple of hours, if the captain of the *Magicienne* doesn't take it into his head to stop us and make further inquiries into our business here, or if the Haytian government doesn't send round the rest of its fleet to see about the destruction of the *Dessalines*, which I daresay they've heard of, somehow, by this time. If they do, and the *Magicienne* doesn't interfere, there'll be a fight, and after that there won't be any Haytian navy to speak of."

"I hope not," she said. "I don't want to see any more fighting like that. By the way, what will happen now when Tristam and his wife get out here and find what has occurred?"

"Well, if they don't take sensible advice and keep out of the *Minnehaha's* way we may find it necessary to do them some very material damage. What I should prefer myself would be to catch them on an unfrequented part of the high seas, take Tristam and his wife and your late mistress prisoner, sink the yacht, and then retire to some quiet and unfrequented little island, say that Cay in which the Spanish treasure-ship is supposed to be buried, and make them individually and collectively pay the debt that Tristam owes me in such a fashion as circumstances might suggest. That would be much preferable to sending them hurriedly to the bottom, as we had to do with the crew of the *Dessalines*."

She pulled her arm out of his and stopped and faced him,

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and said with a smile on her lips and a little quaver in her voice:

"Francisco, which are you—a man or a devil, or both?"

"To the world at large, perhaps both," he laughed. "To those I love, a man, perhaps not quite as good as the average. To those I hate or those who may happen to get into my way—whatever your ladyship pleases to call me. Names, after all, don't matter very much."

"No, I daresay a good many highly respectable people at home would gladly be quite as wicked as we are if it wasn't for the policemen, and, talking about wickedness, I suppose we may expect a visit sometime to-day from the President and Madame Sybil. It will be rather awkward if Don Gregorio has happened to tell her about the boy being on board."

"I don't think there is very much chance of that—I mean of his having told her. I don't remember saying anything to him about him, and he only saw him for a minute or two on board if he saw him at all, and in any case I don't think he would know enough to connect him with the lady he now honours with the title of 'wife.' But even if he has done, what then? We have simply to say that the boy fell overboard by accident. Captain Peters yonder will tell her that he saw him do it, and both the officers will be prepared to swear that they lowered the boat, and that he sank before they could reach him. You know people who arrange accidents of this sort mustn't forget to arrange circumstances to fit them."

"I see," she said, looking up at him with a smile. "Still it was just as well that I mentioned it, because now I shall be able to do my share, if necessary, in arranging what the truth has got to be."

Within a few miles of the land the *Minnehaha* slowed down and ran into the harbour at an ordinary speed so as to avoid exciting the suspicions of the officers of the *Magicienne*, which was still lying off the river mouth. She had not been long at her old anchorage before a steam launch with a gaily fringed awning over the stern put out from the jetty under the citadel, and came gliding towards the yacht.

"There they come!" said Lorrain to her ladyship, who was standing with him on the deck. "Now I suppose I need hardly remind your ladyship of the fact that the best way to treat an enemy up to the outbreak of actual hostilities is with the most perfect courtesy and consideration. It is all the more necessary to do this when the enemy happens to be a woman."

"Oh, I fully understand that!" she laughed. "My late mistress, you know, used to visit at some very good houses indeed, and if you want to see good society with the paint off you must look at it from the servants' hall. In the drawing-room you only see the polish, but from below stairs you can see under the surface. I don't think you'll have much fault to find with my reception of Madame Sybil."

Lorrain had never admired her as much as he did when he watched her doing the honours of the yacht to the woman who was her worst and her most dangerous enemy. Women, as a rule, find it much easier to be agreeable to people they would like to kill than men do, and the frankness of her ladyship's cordiality was so perfect that it completely deceived even Madame Sybil herself, who, to her ladyship's great relief, didn't seem to have any knowledge of her son's having been on board the yacht. They lunched in the saloon, and after the afternoon siesta Lorrain had a long talk with the General and Captain Peters on the details of the expedition up the Ozama.

The yacht was to be left in charge of the first officer and the chief engineer, who had secret orders from Lorrain to permit no communication whatever with the shore, and to keep steam up ready for any emergencies. The expedition was to be composed of Captain Peters, the second officer, two quartermasters, and ten of the crew and twenty negro labourers and porters provided by Don Gregorio. Lorrain would of course be in supreme command, and her ladyship was to accompany him on mule-back. They dined that night at the palace, and when they had gone back on board the *Minnehaha* and the President and his lady had retired for the night, she said to him:

"You are sure that the boy was on board when they came here?"

"Yes, Querida, I saw him, and I asked the late Sir Langton who he was, and he told me that he was the son of a friend of his in England, and that they were going to take him home for a long holiday from the college at St. Thomas."

Then she said, with a sort of hiss running through her voice:

"If he was on board to-day they had him hidden away. If they didn't mean foul play why didn't they speak of him? Ah, yes, I see it now. When Lorrain saw me here last night he knew what would happen if I found the boy on board her: That is why he went out to sea this morning. They have murdered him, the poor little fellow—murdered him! I have not been as good to him myself as I might have been, but still he was my son and I would have seen that he had his rights, the rights which that mistress of Lorrain's has stolen from him. Now listen to me, Gregorio," she went on, putting her two white hands on the little man's shoulders, and looking down from her queenly height into his upturned eyes. "Whether this story you were telling me last night about the Gold Magnet is true or not, if you let these people leave this island alive I will leave it when they do, for if I have to follow them to the end of the earth I will do so, and if I have to wait twenty years for my revenge I will wait, but in the end they shall pay for what they have done. What a misfortune it was I didn't take Arthur away before! If I'd done that I might have gone to England now and taken the position that is mine by rights."

"Console yourself, Querida," he replied with a clumsy caress. "Console yourself, and when our treasury is full, as this magical needle shall make it, you shall have a position more brilliant than that. Meanwhile, have no fear about these people. Let them once get into the interior, and it shall be my business to see that they don't come back. I don't think Lorrain would give that thing up except with his life, and you can be quite sure that I don't mean to let him take it out of the island. Only let him get away from that ship and those infernal guns of hers, and you shall see what will happen."

About two hours after sunrise the next morning the expedition started, after Lorrain and her ladyship had drained a farewell glass of champagne with the President and Madame Sybil, and received their best wishes for the success of the enterprise, and shortly before sunset the same evening, a strange, white-painted craft with the hull and armament of a warship and the rigging of a yacht came rushing up from the southward at a tremendous speed, dipped the Stars and Stripes to the *Magicienne's* white ensign as she passed, and, slowing down as she entered the bay, dropped anchor about three hundred yards outside the berth occupied by the *Minnehaha*.

(To be continued.)

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By WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "Through the Valley," "A Slave of Routine," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XIX.

AS THE WIVES OF SCRIPTURE.

"I MUST go away," said Meresia, bursting in upon Elizabeth, who had denied herself to visitors. "You got my letter saying I was coming, and that I wanted to see you alone?"

"Yes. What is the trouble now?"

"A feverish unrest, a burning desire to be on the move, a horror of home and the domestic circle, which consists of Alfonso and myself. He has engagements to-day, both afternoon and evening, so I am free. Now, Elizabeth, dear, you must get your maid to toss a tea-jacket into a bag, pack your things for the night, and come down to Brighton with me for a breath of sea air. I've telegraphed for rooms at the Norfolk Hotel, where I stayed last winter, after influenza, you remember. Oh! don't look as if you were going to back out of it; don't say no, unless you would drive me to despair and an early grave!"

"But I have a dinner engagement this evening."

"What is that in comparison with my health, perhaps my reason? Send a special messenger with a letter to say you are called away by a sick friend—sick in soul and mind. The body is always considered, but the mind may suffer torments, agonies, and the only name we give it is—Depression!"

Meresia moved about the room restlessly as she spoke. She was not like her usual self. She talked quickly—a new thing for her—and did not pause to consider Elizabeth's convenience. The latter noticed that Meresia's cheeks were burning, unnaturally flushed, and her eyes, too, had the brightness of danger-signals, while she carried with her a convincing sense of trouble, which Elizabeth could not mistake.

"Why are you so anxious to go away?"

"Why does a woman want to escape her husband?" queried Meresia, raising her eyebrows and pausing in her walk.

"Because she does not love him, I suppose."

"Exactly! Imagine yourself perpetually in contact with a half of yourself that was absolutely distasteful—abhorrent to you. One whose opinions grew daily more impossible to agree with or re-echo—one who allowed you no voice in matters of importance, who laughed at your notions, derided your principles, checked your free will. You are thinking me terribly selfish; I see that in your face. Alfonso has made me so. It is the bad training. So pity, don't condemn. Have you decided to come, like the dear, good, generous creature you are?" Elizabeth laid her hand on Meresia's shoulder and felt her trembling with excitement.

"Yes," she said, "they will have to manage without me to-night. I will send the message."

Meresia sank into a chair with a sigh of relief.

"It has got on my nerves—this existence with Alfonso. Once I had a well-balanced mind, governed by moderation, now I cannot keep my faculties in bounds or order. They seem to run away with me. I sometimes think I am hardly accountable for what I say and do. You are the tonic I most require. These London fogs choke me. To-day we shall breathe the sea. But you must be quick, Elizabeth, for I have looked out a train, and there is no time to spare. My luggage is outside. We will drive straight to the station."

Miss James proved a good friend and a true one to those she really loved, and Meresia was very near her heart. Elizabeth's firm, self-reliant nature pitied the passing moods of the younger woman.

"You are feeling things far too keenly, Meresia," she said, "little things that hardly matter."

"Perhaps they are not so little as you think. But I cannot tell you all."

"It is the old story, dear. I warned you long ago. You are the sort of woman to make her own tragedy. You meet sorrows half way, and taking them by the hand, lead them on, walk with them, talk with them, and, finally, fall under their influences at the moment you most desire to escape. So when the dark hours come—and the difficulties—you cannot tide them over, as I have tided many troubles, either by ignoring them or making them objects of ridicule and sarcasm."

"No," said Meresia, "that is quite incomprehensible to me. I have not grasped such a situation. I never could. My marriage was my great mistake, or rather his. Don't let us talk of it, Elizabeth, or perhaps I shall tell you some of my thoughts, and then you will hate me, and not be good to me any more."

In less than half-an-hour, Elizabeth was ready to start, and together they drove to the station, Meresia childishly delighted at having got her away.

"Now I am almost happy," she said as they settled themselves in the Pullman car. "Oh! I forgot to get a paper," springing out, "wait for me, Elizabeth, I shall not be a minute."

Meresia returned quickly, her face paler than before.

"Look," she whispered, "look at that man passing the window now."

"With the small red moustache and light-coloured eyes?"

"Yes."

"What of him? A most ordinary individual. Why does he interest you?"

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"I see him wherever I go," said Meresia; "always that man!"

"He is in your circle. It often happens so."

Mrs. Aladros shrugged her shoulders impatiently. Surely Elizabeth was strangely dense to-day.

"Perhaps," said Miss James, seeing Meresia dissatisfied at the explanation, "he follows you purposely. If so, the man is wonderfully presumptuous, for he is certainly not an attractive admirer."

"I know he shadows me, but as to admiration——"

Meresia laughed, and dismissed the subject by pretending to read.

"You are full of fears and imaginations," said Elizabeth. "You don't suppose he is a robber?"

"No."

"Well, then, why should he wish to shadow your steps?"

"There are more reasons than two in the world," replied Meresia. "Think again."

"I give it up. What! you are not going to tell me? I don't believe you have any clear ideas on the subject yourself, for all your wise looks. How about a visit to Dr. Serano when you get back to town? He is a wonderful man for nerves."

"I have been to him already, and he can do nothing for me. His treatment only makes me worse."

The train moved slowly out of the station, and with the motion Meresia's spirits rose. She talked vaguely on many subjects, and appeared quite happy as they emerged from London fog to bright sunshine.

"It only seems like a few minutes," she said, when Brighton was reached, and they drove along the crowded front to the hotel. "We will rest, unpack, have tea, and go out for a blow afterwards, if you are willing, Elizabeth. I feel as if a little walk would do me good."

"Certainly; please yourself in everything, I don't care what I do," replied Elizabeth cheerfully. "I am here as sick nurse to a troubled mind, and the only wage I demand is a complete cure, that my patient may prove a credit."

"Sit in this comfortable chair by the fire, while I take my things out, Elizabeth. This is the dressing-bag Alfonso gave me when I married him. It is like him, very large and superior! I don't suppose you have ever met anything approaching Alfonso's superiority. He looks on himself as a little god—or rather a big god—among men. His judgment is absolutely correct; he, like the king, can do no wrong——"

Meresia spoke bitterly, then, with a curl of her lip, and a defiant raising of her head, she continued:

"At least I have escaped him for a few hours, he does not know that I am here. I merely left word to say I was staying away until to-morrow. The last time I did that he followed me. To-night he is not coming home till quite late——"

"You came away and did not tell him," broke in Elizabeth. "Really, Meresia, that was not quite fair towards me. Your husband will be naturally anxious to know where you are. If I had realised your relations were so strained, I should not have aided and abetted their further severance. It seems a tactless, foolish move of yours—this aimless visit to Brighton."

"He may be annoyed, but if he says that he was anxious, I have a very good reply. Alfonso professes to know all my movements without my telling him. You see, he poses as practically supernatural, and it is rather pleasant sometimes to prove him mistaken. Dear Elizabeth, don't be angry. It does not sit well on you, and I am so happy, with miles of railway lines between me and Alfonso."

Meresia's voice was so low and seductive, Elizabeth could not find it in her heart to continue her lecture.

"You won't think it at all wrong of me after tea," Mrs. Aladros assured her, "but early lunch always makes you unpleasantly virtuous. Put yourself in my place, Elizabeth."

"My dear, I could not do that, for I should never, under your circumstances, have come to be in that place. You married a man because his nature was stronger than yours—the result should not surprise you."

Meresia soon contrived to get back into her friend's good books, and Alfonso's name was no longer mentioned between them.

They went for their stroll by the sea, chanced to meet several acquaintances, and returned refreshed in mind and body.

"I shall slip into a teagown for dinner," said Meresia, going to her room.

The passage was empty, and as she flung open her door she was humming a tune she had heard on a barrel organ outside the hotel. For a moment she did not turn up the electric light, but tossed her muff on the bed, and unwound her boa in the glow of the fire.

Suddenly she was aware of a figure seated in the large arm chair, drawn near the grate with its back to her.

For a moment her heart stood still; she could neither move nor speak. Then, with a little cry, she rushed to the door and turned on the electric light.

"Thanks; it was getting rather dark," said Aladros.

Meresia stared, as if seeing a vision, with parted lips and dilating eyes. He stretched his arms as though he had been asleep, and watched her quietly.

"I—I was not expecting you," she faltered, at a loss for words.

"No; but I don't like you staying about in hotels without me. I have come at great personal inconvenience, so do not let it occur again."

"I am not alone; Elizabeth is here."

"I know; but I do not care to trust you with Miss James. Besides, your erratic ways are growing tiresome; I've had about enough of them. It is a wife's duty to submit to her husband, and obey him. If you don't learn your duty soon, Meresia, I shall take steps to teach you."

"It seems," she answered coldly, her voice vibrating with scorn, "that you have taken them already, or else how did you know I was here? You have not been home, and I cannot imagine your intuition being quite so correct as you would have me believe. The days of fairy tales are over; I want the truth."

"Oh! curiosity, thy name is Meresia!" he said scoffingly.

He still lay back in the big chair, while his wife stood against the door for support.

Now she came slowly forward, so that the heat of the fire scorched her dress as she leant with one elbow on the mantelpiece and her eyes on Aladros.

"You have paid somebody to spy upon me," she said. "Do you think I have not guessed it? Am I so dull, so senseless, as not to see that my steps are dogged. I have done nothing wrong, my only crime is that of avoiding you."

"The greatest of all crimes in my eyes," he answered, and she could not tell from his tone if this were flattery or sarcasm.

"How dare you, Alfonso, how dare you treat me in such a manner? Can you deny, that for the last week you have known my every movement through hiring detectives to shadow me? Is that not the grossest insult you could pay a woman?"

"You deserve this—and more," he answered, "for your folly. If I please, I shall have you watched, but it is neither pleasant for you nor for me. All I want is to teach you submission. When you realise that I am your master—that I cannot be thrown aside like a plaything of which you are tired—then perhaps things may go smoothly again. All this unruliness I date from the day of that publication concerning my dealings with certain prisoners in Spain. Such a childish exhibition of temper as you displayed is not a very elevating memory."

"Those dealings were vile," she said, choking back her rising passion. "They entered into my heart and my blood, and contaminated any softer feelings that I had for you."

"Then you are at enmity with me still?"

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Meresia paused to think, and the working of her brain was quick and decisive.

To feign submission, to win freedom from suspicion by acting the part of a hypocrite, would not that even be better than beating her wings against a barred cage?

An expression of meekness and surrender stole stealthily over Meresia's face.

"Look at me, Alfonso. Am I so difficult to tame?"

He saw a quivering smile part her lips and tears gather in her eyes; eyes with "just that soft shade of green we sometimes see in evening skies."

She knelt down on the hearthrug at his feet.

"You conquered me in the past. You conquer me again. I will be dutiful as the wives of Scripture. I will bow down before the judge!"

CHAPTER XX.

COALS OF FIRE.

"DON'T hurry, I'm early," said Bertie Haydon.

José Serano went to his desk, sealed a letter, and addressed it. His old school fellow, standing on the hearthrug watching him, marvelled that success had changed the man so little.

In evening dress, and by artificial light, José looked scarcely older than when he had left for Spain.

Bertie recalled their last walk together by the Serpentine, José's blasphemous toss, when the coin rolled into the water, and his mocking words as to his fortunes in the future. He had prophesied that his old pal would meet him as a beggar in the streets, and hear him plead in the stock phrase of the professional alms seeker:

"*Por el amor de Dios, senorito,*" etc, etc.

Instead—though he had returned to England in a humble position—Bertie had not met him until Fortunatus smiled afresh.

"I've been trying to write that letter for the last month," said José, tossing it upon a pile of others. "It goes to Madrid, where all my recollections are bitter and impossible to forget. But I should not say all," he added, after a pause, "I have been answering a long unacknowledged letter from the good old priest who converted me to the Catholic faith. It will be full of disappointments for him, and yet he still prays for me."

José smiled as he spoke, and the light now full on his face revealed lines which told of suffering and thought. For the first time Bertie noticed his hair was streaked with grey, and he was puzzled, because of the boyish manner adopted by José in his presence.

"We are dining at the Berkeley," he said, "a party of eight, and going on to the Gaiety. I find people like an amusement that neither taxes their brains nor upsets their liver. This style of play is singularly harmless, everything is harmless that does not make one think. Do you know I've had six Ibsen patients during the last week—people who have been reading morbid literature, and sitting out unwholesome, indigestible plays. They are difficult subjects to treat, too, especially as I am obliged to christen their complaints."

The two men drove to the Berkeley, and waited in the hall for the arrival of José's guests. He knew the best people in London, and was universally popular.

"Who is that fellow staring at you?" asked Bertie.

José glanced across in the direction indicated, and a flash of recollection broke in upon him. Recognition was mutual, as the stranger advanced with outstretched hand.

"I hope I am not forgotten, Mr. Serano?"

José answered warmly that no English face met in Madrid had escaped his memory.

"How long ago is it exactly?" he said. "Let me see; I cannot recall the date, though I remember our dinner that evening in the café, to the very courses we consumed together. Though I can neither offer you a *puchero*, a *pisto*, or *sopa de cebollas*, will you give me the pleasure of your company to-night? My friends will be here directly, and if you don't mind being odd man out——"

"I hardly like to accept, for I shall make your party uneven."

José's guests arrived as he spoke, all except one, Gregory Merriman.

"He promised to come a week ago," said Serano, "but I have seen or heard nothing of him since. Yesterday I expected him to lunch, but he did not turn up."

"Then, instead of an encumbrance, I may prove a useful stop-gap," said the late invited guest, as Serano introduced him to a charming girl in yellow, who bore the stamp of those who would always wear silken dresses, feed on dainty food, and live in idleness.

"Who has failed you?" asked Bertie as they went in to dinner and settled themselves compactly at a round table by the window.

"Gregory. I can't think what has become of the fellow," replied José.

"Oh! didn't you know he was ill? Awfully ill, I was told. Touch and go, so they said at the club. I forget what was the matter with him. I wonder you were not sent for."

"I don't visit the Merrimans, and they have their family doctor," replied José. "Poor boy! He is quite the pick of the bunch. I hope he may pull through."

A gloom seemed to have fallen on their host, and José was less talkative than usual. After dinner he gave Bertie the tickets for the stalls, and begged his friends to excuse him, as he had a patient to see. So, taking a doctor's license, he escaped fulfilling his social duties, shunting them on to the very capable shoulders of his old schoolfellow.

Gratitude is almost an unknown quantity in the hearts of the human race, but with José it grew instead of diminished with time. It was no small thing to him the memory of Gregory's stammered sympathy and proffered help in the dark days of poverty and loneliness. He would have done much for him or Bertie Haydon, his only true friends at the time of Miss Betts' death.

So burying his animosity for Mrs. Merriman and her husband, he drove straight to their house, and was shown into the empty drawing-room to await an interview.

The alterations were few in spite of the lapse of time.

Miss Betts' photograph had been moved from its prominent position to a back shelf, and placed in a shabby frame. He remembered it was once honoured by the gorgeous setting that now held Mrs. Merriman's latest portrait, taken in full evening dress.

There was the hush of illness in the house, and the drawing-room wore a deserted air. A large pot of chrysanthemums were left faded and brown by the piano, the fire had sunk to mere cinder and ash.

Presently the rustle of a skirt announced Mrs. Merriman's advent. Her eyes were very red, as if from crying, and heavy for want of sleep.

José went quickly forward, and took her hand.

"I'm so thankful you've come," she said, "we did not like to ask you, though Gregory repeatedly mentions your name. You see, since your return to England, you entirely broke the old connection, and we naturally felt there must be a reason, some offence or misunderstanding. It has been a great sorrow both to my husband and myself, for as a boy we were so much attached to you, and then when I think of my dear sister, and all her——"

"I have come to talk of Gregory," interrupted José brusquely, "for the rest we will let it pass. What is the good of raking up old troubles?—they are better forgotten."

"My poor boy—oh! my poor Gregory!" cried Mrs. Merriman, dissolving into tears.

"I only heard he was ill this evening," said José.

"Why, for the last three nights I have hardly slept an hour, and our doctor—an old family doctor—seems at the end of his resources. This morning I lost all patience with him. I am afraid I was very rude. He did not come in the

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afternoon as we expected. My husband says he overheard me call him a fool to his face, but I have no recollection of saying anything so dreadful. When I am thoroughly upset I lose my head. He has mismanaged Gregory shamefully, and now there are complications! You have a great reputation—your cleverness is well known. Will you save him?"

Mrs. Merriman trembled as she spoke. She could not blind herself to the fact that Gregory's life was in danger.

Before José could reply a note was brought in from the doctor. Mrs. Merriman read the contents aloud:

"'Dear Madam—

"'Having expressed your opinion of me so frankly this morning, I think it would be advisable if you sent for some one else, in whom you could repose more confidence.'"

"That is fortunate," said José, "now there can be no question of outraging professional etiquette. Take me to Gregory's room."

The very sight of José seemed to calm Mrs. Merriman, and bring comfort to her soul.

"Gregory will get better now," she said confidently.

It looked as if her words were destined to come true, for her son, in spite of his weakness, grew brighter and apparently stronger as José bent over him.

"You won't leave me," he said, "you will stay and see me through this, old fellow."

José nodded.

"Of course," he said, "of course."

Gregory had at the best but a poor constitution, and was suffering from a severe inflammatory attack. Mrs. Merriman was quite right in voting the case shamefully mismanaged.

José's skill needed taxing to its fullest to undo the mischief already wrought. Unfailingly he watched his patient night after night, staying in the house, spending most of the hours at Gregory's bedside, till the crisis was over, and the corner turned. In vain the parents tried to express their gratitude, but he would listen to no word of thanks, and led them to understand his time was given up in personal friendship for Gregory, and not as a matter of business.

"I wish," said Mrs. Merriman to her husband—"I wish that we had done more for José when poor Harriet died."

"I don't know why you say 'more,'" he answered, "for I was not aware that we did anything."

"It was such a strange position," she continued, "and he really left England before we had time to settle anything. Of course I was upset at my sister's death, and I did not think. Now it is too late, and we can never repay him—never!"

A silence fell between them, for each stood convicted by conscience.

Gregory's convalescence meant a change into the country, and for a while he saw nothing of José, who vanished from the Merrimans' family circle as abruptly as he had entered it.

"So you have buried the hatchet, and made it up with Miss Betts' relations?" said Bertie, when next he met Serano.

"Yes," replied José, "I bore them a grudge, but it is a bothering thing to carry about, and Gregory was a brick when they were broken reeds."

"I met Mrs. Aladros last night," said Bertie. "What is the matter with her?"

"How should I know, my dear fellow? I have not been called in."

"She has changed since she married."

"They often do, Bertie; it sort of unsettles them. There is only one thing that tries a woman more than marriage, and that is, to be left high and dry without it! But what particular alteration do you complain of in Mrs. Aladros?"

"Well, you see," said Bertie Haydon, "I was rather a particular pal of Meresia's in old days, and I'm not so sure I shouldn't have married her myself if she'd given me the chance. I never saw anyone so perfectly contented, and with such a happy way of living her own life openly, fearlessly, and letting other people live theirs without remark or comment. Now she seems ill at ease, nervous, jaded—driven I might almost say—and a perfect slave to her husband. By jove! what an exacting brute he is! One can tell that at a glance. Meresia asked me last night if I thought she looked older. She said she could not judge for herself, as she got so used to the woman in the looking-glass. I told her 'yes,' that she had aged in the last month. I consider her young enough to bear these truths. It was the first time I had spoken the truth for a fortnight. The next task I set myself was to discover the reason of the change, but Meresia proved evasive. I led the subject gently to her husband. 'I suppose—you—er—hit it off capitally together—eh?' She looked straight at me with those odd green eyes, and smiled. 'If it comes to hitting,' she said, 'Alfonso is the stronger; I am like a feather in the hands of a giant, or the paws of a lion.'"

"You should have told her the story," replied José, "of the gust of wind that came and blew the feather away; weak and light, it was whirled on—on—by the gale, far out of the lion's reach, even beyond the sound of his roar! Tell her that, Bertie, next time; tell her that!"

José spoke in quick, excited tones, which carried Bertie back to the days of their boyhood.

"I say," he stammered, "you—you are not—interested in Meresia?"

"You mean am I in love with the wife of Aladros? No! The woman he owns is defiled in my eyes almost beyond respect, but remains still within the limitless range of pity. He has killed the girl he married; can't you see that she is dead, and the thing new born in her place is a caricature, badly executed by our friend Aladros? He has remodelled his clay clumsily, those great fingers lack artistic feeling. Meresia is what he has made her. From an angel she will grow into a devil, so soon as the hour is ripe and the clay sets."

(To be continued.)

Signor McCoy, the great and wonderful circus horse whose pranks have caused readers of the BIG BUDGET such laughter, is now at Barnum and Bailey's Circus, Olympia. Those who live in or near London should not miss seeing this magnificent charger.

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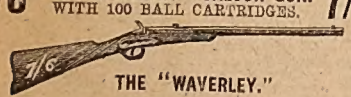

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YOUR ESTEEMED INQUIRY DULY TO HAND.

THE guinea offered for the most absurd amalgamation of two well-known proverbs has been won by Mr. Joseph Percival, 166, Oldham Road, Ashton-under-Lyne.

BELOW will be found letters and asterisks indicating certain places in the British Isles. Each asterisk represents a letter. To the person who first correctly names the places a guinea will be sent. All attempts to be sent on post-cards. Place the numbers and your solution against each. Date of closing, Monday, January 17th.

1. A * * * * * * N
2. B * * * * * * N
3. C * * * * * N
4. D * * * * * Y
5. L * * * * * * * R

W. K. E.—There is no secret made of the fact that the Pope's yearly income exceeds £600,000, including the numerous "thank offerings" he receives every year from all parts of the globe.

WHEELER writes to point out the singular fact that nearly all cyclists depend principally upon the right foot to push the machine along. "This," he says, "may be proved by examining the balls on a crank axle, those on one side will be found to be worn much more than those on the other. This is owing to the greater strain that is exerted upon the right side."

AN ADMIRER asks: "Why do the officers of the British Army so often appear in mufti when off duty?" ———The reason officers do not constantly wear uniform is that once in a time of absurd irritation that this country should possess so large a standing army, the Duke of Wellington ordered all officers to wear plain clothes when not on duty, so that no one could point to the well-dressed defenders of our country and tremble at their numbers.

E. R.—No, the Bank of England is not the oldest bank in London. Snow's, Hoare's, and Child's were all established some time before it.

MAJOR.—The average edition of a book is a thousand copies.

DOLLY comes along with a frivolingly curious question, which, however, must have perplexed many other of our lady readers at some time or another. "When my lover kisses me," she asks, "is it correct for me to raise my veil?" ———According to the strictest rules of etiquette, you need not, although probably your lover would prefer that you did, and in a question like this his opinion should have first consideration.

VIC wants to know if animals ever faint.———Yes, they do sometimes, but more rarely than human beings. When they do, it is always caused either by extreme physical pain or great heat, and never by a sudden shock to the nervous system, which is not sufficiently high developed.

LANDRAIL.—The expression should always be spelt "all right," and never "alright," as you suggest.

F. S.—The south-west wind prevails more than any other in this country by fifty-four days in the year. This accounts for the fact that many of our forest trees lean towards the east, which is particularly noticeable in the poplar on account of the great softness and flexibility of its wood.

A. L. W. asks: "How is it that people who have red hair are so often possessed of a fiery temperament to match?"———Scientists say that red hair is a sign of a superabundance of iron in the blood, and that it is the matter that enters the red hair that imparts the vigour, the elasticity, the great vitality, the overflowing, thoroughly healthy animal life which runs through the veins of the ruddy haired, and this strong, sentient animal life is what renders them more intense in their emotions than their more languid fellow creatures.

W. W.—The value of the British Crown jewels is estimated to be about £3,000,000.

YES, PATRICK, you are quite right in asserting that your countrymen are, on an average, taller than either the Scotch or the English. Most people have an idea that the Scotsmen have the palm for stature, but my authority is a very learned professor, who makes it his business to measure representatives of the different races.

T. P. asks: "How much gas does a ton of coal contain?" ———Almost 10,000ft.

NOVICE is invited to a dinner party, and before going he would like to know whether he should offer the right or left arm to the lady he escorts to the dining-room.———It depends upon circumstances: If you have to go down a flight of stairs to reach the dining-room you should offer the lady the arm which is nearer the wall and further away from the banisters, so that her dress may not rub against them. Should, however, the dining-room be upon the ground floor, it would be more correct to offer the right arm.

N. B. D. wants to know if there is any difference between a life "assurance" and a life "insurance."———It is incorrect to speak of a life "insurance" at all; that expression is only used in a policy against fire. A life policy is always spoken of as an "assurance."

K. G.—£10,000 is the yearly salary of the President of the United States.

R. W.—Londoners keep almost as many medical men busy looking after their ailments as do all the inhabitants of Scotland and Ireland put together. This fact disproves your statement that Scotsmen and Irishmen are not healthier than the inhabitants of our great city.

L. P. T. was married a few weeks ago, and writes to ask if I can furnish him with the name and address of the "idiot" who first introduced the shoe-throwing mania on these occasions. He is still suffering from a protuberance upon his head caused by that part of him coming into contact with an old shoe thrown at it by a well-meaning friend, and he would therefore like to interview the originator upon the subject.——— That would be rather a difficult matter, I am afraid, and L. T. P. will have to bottle his wrath this time, for the custom dates back to the time of the Israelites, when an old foot-cover was always included with any property one man might give another. It signifies that the bride's father has now no more control over her.

PEASANT.—The best kind of cow you can keep is a Kerry. For good, all-round usefulness no other breed can beat them.

FABER.—Only three people know the password of the Tower of London, and they are the Queen, the Lord Mayor, and the Constable. This password is sent to the Lord Mayor quarterly, signed by Her Majesty. It is merely a survival of an old custom.

S. Y. asks: "Is the speed of a lion or tiger much greater than that of a man?" ———For a short distance a lion or a tiger can proceed at the rate of a fast horse, and thus easily outstrip a man; but they lose their wind at the end of about half a mile. They have little endurance, and are remarkably weak in lung power.

Notice to Competitors.

IN all Prize Competitions the Editor's decision is final. No correspondence will be entertained when once a competition is finished and the result published.

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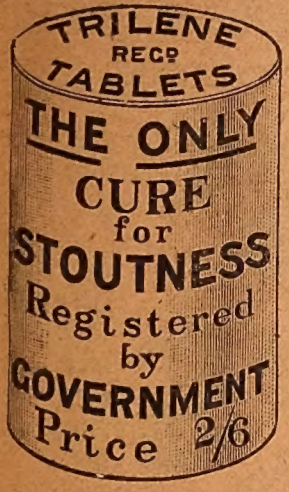

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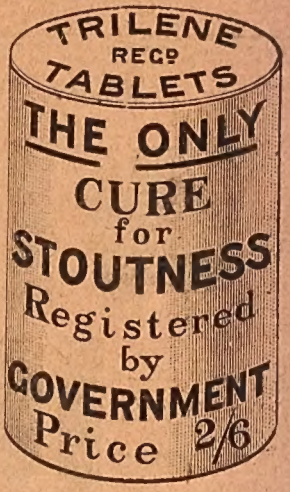

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87, Alexandra Road, Norwich, Oct. 19th, 1896.

"GENTLEMEN,—In reference to Trilene Tablets, I may say that my wife found the greatest possible benefit from the use of them—their action was rapid, and exceeded our utmost expectations, as they were also most beneficial to the respiratory organs. My wife was for many years growing too stout; but although the disease was, I consider, chronic, the Tablets soon reduced the same completely. You have our united thanks; and if I can do anything to promote your interests, I will freely use my utmost endeavours to do so.

"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

PRINCESS LIECHTENSTEIN writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send me directly your excellent Tablets."

SURGEON-COLONEL E. S. BRANDER, M.D., writes from Jhansi, India: "September 12th, 1897. In my experience your Tablets form an efficient remedy for reducing weight."

LADY CONRAD writes from Wiesbaden: "I am very pleased with your Tablets."

MRS. BOSTON, of Clifford Street, South Wigston, Leicester, writes: "I am much thinner and lighter in myself since taking your Tablets."

W. G. LOVE, 4, Kirk Street, Peterhead, N.B., says: "I finished Tablets a fortnight ago, and am reduced a great deal—never felt better in my life."

Convalescent Home, New Brighton, Cheshire.

MISS S. J. PRITCHARD says: "They have done me much good. I am 2lb. lighter already."

Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk either by means of severe dieting or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a case of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are guaranteed absolutely harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, or any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing Cure for Obesity. The Tablets are sold in boxes at 2s. 6d., and are obtainable from the Trilene Company, 66, Finsbury Pavement, London."

25, Windsor Terrace, Penarth, Cardiff.

MISS M. FLAVELL says: "I have lost 2st., and am much better in health."

Windsor Hotel, Merthyr Vale, South Wales.

MR. J. THOMAS writes: "When I started the Tablets I weighed 17½st., and have got down to 14st. 9lb."

West Cornforth, Ferryhill.

MR. WM. USHER says: "A sister of mine, who was 17st., was greatly reduced by your Tablets to 15st."

MRS. HUTCHINSON, 46, Irwell Street, Widnes, Lancashire, writes: "I have taken three boxes and am reduced 2st."

A. D. BILLINGS, Bell Inn, Aldershot, writes: "Have derived great benefit already. Less in size and weight, breathing greatly improved."

MISS WELLS, Aldeburgh Hall, Saxmundham, writes: "I am pleased to say I receive great benefit from them."

MISS DUGGLEBY, 16, New Road, Driffield, writes: "The girl who took your Tablets is reduced about 2½st."

MISS C. E. SINGLETON, 3, Courtenay Terrace, Teignmouth, says: "They have done me a great deal of good, and I will do my best to make them known. You may use this letter as you please."

MISS MACPHERSON, Balnagowan Lodge, Methuen, Perth, says: "I have taken one box, and am reduced 1st."

MRS. EDMONDS, Pontyguesta, Pontychin, Llantrissant, says: "I have lost more than a stone in a very short time."

MARIAN TAYLOR, Church Farm, St. James, Halesworth, says: "I have lost quite 2st. since taking your Tablets."

Miss GILLESPIE, 50, Chancer Road, Forest Gate, Essex, says: "I have lost just 3st."

E. NICHOLSON, Crossfield, Staniland, Halifax, says: "I am pleased to say your Tablets are lessening my size very much, and my two sisters are going in for your pleasant treatment."

COUNTESS G. FÜRSTENBERG, of Stammheim, Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

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